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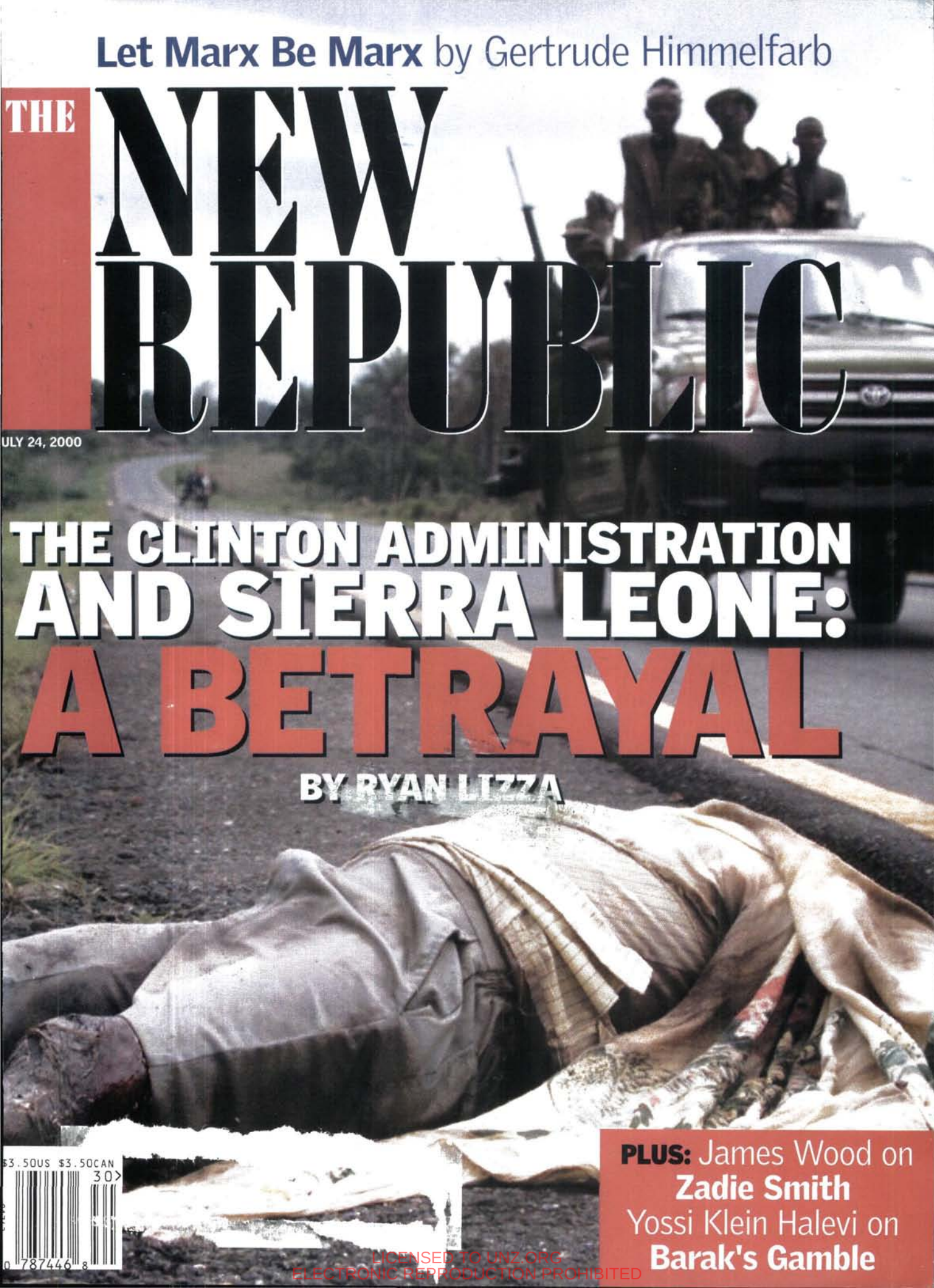

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Won't work

TO THE EDITORS:

Jeffrey Rosen writes persuasively and perhaps correctly that "hostile environment" sexual harassment is more properly viewed as an invasion-of-privacy tort ("Fall of Private Man," June 12). However, Rosen fails to explain how reconceiving hostile-environment law in this way will decrease the draconian monitoring policies of many workplaces. In particular, Rosen fails to seriously assess the law of vicarious liability, under which employers can be held responsible for the actions of their employees. If employers can be liable for the torts of their employees (and in many states they can), then they have every incentive to monitor employees in hopes of avoiding liability.

Furthermore, Rosen makes no mention of modern plaintiffs' litigation tactics, especially the "deep pocket" mentality and the use of discovery as a negotiating tool. If an employee believes someone in her workplace invaded her privacy, she has every incentive to name the employer (a "deep pocket") in the lawsuit. Accordingly, the plaintiff will pursue a vicarious-liability theory and/or attempt to show how the privacy invasion produced adverse employment actions (i.e., "real" discrimination). Even if such claims are weak, suing the employer will open it up to the costs of discovery—in terms of both attorneys' fees and information disclosure. This prospect will, in turn, encourage the employer to reach a settlement. In framing its conduct so as to avoid a sequel to this sordid affair, the employer will likely reinstate its monitoring practices.

I, too, lament the loss of workplace privacy, but Rosen's solution falls short of its promise.

MICHAEL HAYS
South Bend, Indiana

TO THE EDITORS:

As Jeffrey Rosen asserts, the fact that hostile-environment law doesn't include some kind of "ordinary sensibilities" test is a serious flaw. But one needn't accept any theory of privacy to see that—or to fix the flaw. Simple, commonsense legislation would do.

More deeply: Should employers police the watercooler chat of their employees in search of remarks that might be offensive even to a person of "ordinary sensibilities"? The answer to this is not so clear. As an employer, I have the right to make my company a civil place to work, and it makes good economic sense for me to do so. I would not go so far as to eavesdrop,

but I would follow up on complaints about offensive jokes and so forth.

But, as Rosen implicitly acknowledges, the most disturbing cases of employer eavesdropping are driven not by considerations like these but by anti-discrimination law. If the law requires me to hire someone I don't want to employ, I can meet the letter of the law by hiring him—and then evade its intent by making his life on the job so miserable that he will "voluntarily" quit. As night follows day, requiring employers to hire certain employees leads to regulations against hostile environments. And employers who would rather not be on the wrong end of a Justice Department lawsuit feel compelled to engage in snooping that has no economic payoff for them and which, in many cases, they find personally offensive.

If anyone can find a way to cut this chain leading from anti-discrimination laws to employer snooping, I will welcome it. The answer may be implicit in Rosen's reflections on privacy, but I don't see it.

TOM FORD
Via the Internet

TO THE EDITORS:

I am sympathetic to Jeffrey Rosen's effort to utilize existing law to cover some forms of sexual harassment and to create a more humane legal situation with regard to the issue. I myself have wondered why quid pro quo sexual harassment wasn't simply considered extortion and treated accordingly. However, the fine-tuning Rosen suggests is far beyond the capabilities of our present legal system. As Rosen himself points out, "the law is a blunderbuss rather than a scalpel." Courts are reluctant to revisit areas of law with case history, no matter how convoluted or unjust the law may be. It also would probably not produce the kind of privacy protection that Rosen thinks is possible.

For instance, the Paula Jones case, like so many others, is a classic "he said, she said" situation. Rosen claims that if the suit had been based upon invasion of privacy, the "discovery process would have focused on Clinton's treatment of Jones" and would not have involved invading the privacy of innocent third parties. But, if so, the discovery process would have come up with nothing except claims and counterclaims, since there was nothing to prove Jones's claims, no matter what the legal principles were. Her attorneys would have been forced to use Clinton's reputation, as alleged by other women, in order to give credibility to Jones's charge.

While the changes Rosen espouses could provide businesses with breathing room, there is no reason to think that corporations would change their monitoring. To satisfy their own paranoia, they will continue to adhere to so-called zero-tolerance policies. Besides, while such policies are cause for much grumbling, there is no indication that the American male worker is that angry. Witness the lack of protests when corporations began requiring drug tests, certainly a far more blatant invasion of privacy. Most American workers realize that the job site is a very public forum and wear their social faces quite readily.

TED MORROW
Golden, Colorado

Woof

TO THE EDITORS:

Inspired by your June 12 editorial, "The Bush Doctrine," and its keynote query ("How stupid does Bush think we are?"), I hereby challenge Texas Governor George W. Bush to a foreign policy debate with my dog, Ralph.

To give the Houston heirhead an intellectually level playing field, Ralph will be briefed only by me. However, Dubya can receive briefings from all the foreign policy advisers he's inherited from his daddy. Although the GOP sees them as hot stuff, these are the nitwits who reduced Russia to a snarling, pre-fascist economic basket case; helped elevate China and Serbia to the status of regional bullies with little fear of the United States; and caused the deaths of thousands of Iraqi and Kurdish civilians while deliberately leaving Saddam Hussein in power to menace the survivors.

Bush handlers, beware: Unlike your candidate, Ralph does not pronounce

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Going South

PEOPLE NORTH OF the border often laugh at the name of Mexico's newly defeated Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), noting that you can't be institutional and revolutionary at the same time. But the gringo press ought to show a little modesty on this point. Mexico's revolution, which in 1910 overthrew the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, did, at first, tread a proper institutional path. It was a constitutional democracy. The president, Francisco I. Madero, was a liberal. Alas, the U.S. embassy took a dim view of Madero and organized a coup d'état. Madero was executed. And all hell broke loose. Revolutionary armies of every size and shape spent the next 15 years in a murderous civil war because no one could agree on a national principle of political legitimacy, given that liberal democracy had failed in the clinch.

So the Institutional Revolutionary Party (under different names, in the early years) came along in 1929 and, through a clever mix of militarism, anti-clericalism, rationalism, nationalism, and bureaucracy, solved that particular problem. The new institutional framework turned out to be pretty solid, too, given that it lasted 71 years. The PRI wasn't bad at managing the economy, either. Living standards for ordinary Mexicans rose right up until the 1970s. But the PRI achievement that deserves the most admiration, particularly in the United States, was lighter and fluffier than politics and economics and thus usually receives no mention at all. It was a cultural achievement. The revolution, guided by its Institutional Party, came up with a new and peculiar way of defining Mexico's national identity that reached back into the ancient Indian—as well as the Spanish—past and yet managed to be reasonably modern, too. And the new definition of what it meant to be Mexican turned out to be hugely creative.

There was a time, in the mid-nineteenth century, when the United States tried to cultivate its own sense of ancient roots. Cooper wrote frontier novels about Indians, Thoreau and Parkman compiled anthropological observations, Whittier and Longfellow composed poems, and a good deal of painting was devoted to the Indian past—all with the aim of digging a little deeper into what it meant to be American. There was even a movement to change the name "America" to something with more of an Indian sound, like "Alleghania." But none of those efforts did much for America's sense of itself. The American idea of history remained tied to the faraway world of England. And, because the English origins grew ever more remote as America became less and less Anglo-Saxon, America's notion of the past never did thicken into the kind of solid root that you can see in Europe and other parts of the world.

With regard to long historical memories, Mexico was probably better endowed from the start, if only because the Aztec and Mayan civilizations outclassed anything that could be found among the mound builders and tepee dwellers farther north. The Puritans who landed in New England saw the Indian religions as a purely Satanic force, but Spanish Catholicism, especially in its Jesuit version, saw something to admire in the old Indian rites. Still, during its first 400 years, Mexico remained largely a Spanish or Creole society sitting atop several different badly wounded Indian societies.

But then came the Mexican Revolution. The great revolutionary hope, as expressed by the PRI, was to take the ancient clay of Mexican society and knead it into vertical columns, making the humblest peasants participants in political and economic structures that led all the way to the highest elites. The PRI was in that respect a Mexican variation on the worldwide twentieth-century effort to build a columnlike society—what political theorists call a corporatist society. It was a movement like Spain's syndicalism, or Italian and Spanish fascism, or Soviet-style communism, or Argentine Peronism. Except that Mexico's version proved to be something other than a national calamity.

Mexico really did change its look in the early decades of the revolution. The European style of the capital and several other major cities began to fade, in favor of a newly hybrid influence. Large numbers of Indian faces began for the first time to appear in the country's political leadership. And Mexican culture bloomed. Octavio Paz pointed out long ago that, leaving aside a few colonial ancestors, Mexican literature was born with the revolution—the literature that you can see in Paz's own poem "Sunstone," with its double orientation toward European modernism and the ancient Indian past. A writer like Ramón López Velarde could picture his own heart being plucked out, as in an Aztec sacrifice.

The literary critic Christopher Domínguez Michael has groaned a little over what he calls the "Chac-mool syndrome" in Mexican letters (a Chac-mool is a reclining figure that receives the plucked heart in the course of a human sacrifice)—the deluded belief that modern Mexicans can summon up the ancient gods. But in Mexico the writers sometimes do. The painters do it, too. The Chac-mool delusion may be at work in one or another of those grand Mexican murals; yet in some of those oil-painted panels you see an entire civilization. Mexican cooking used to mean Spanish cuisine, regionally adapted. But the revolution brought old Indian foods back into favor, and the resulting culinary hybrid has turned out to be among the world's handful of high cuisines. You can see the same creative evolution in modern Mexican architecture, with its Hispano-Aztec touches. And, in that manner, Mexico's twentieth-century art and culture, spurred on by the revolution, achieved the vertical, corporatist quality that the PRI tried to instill in Mexican life as a whole—the columns of life and sensibility that reached effortlessly down into the subterranean Indian past and up into the lofty modernism of Europe, a culture that could gaze backward and into the present at the same time, a modern national sensibility with an ancient local memory.

It's true that, long ago, the PRI committed the sins that one-party states and corporatist structures always commit. The PRI never fell prey to the totalitarian insanities of a Communist or fascist party—never drew its sword looking for entire social classes to exterminate. Yet its culture of back-scratching, its bloated bureaucracy, its nationalist demagogy, its occasional violence, and its habit of anti-democratic fraud have done their damage. "One step forward, three steps back" became the national policy. So it's good that Mexico has finally rid itself of the corrupt old party. It's good that Mexico seems to be making its way back to the democratic path of Madero. It's good that everyone is celebrating. Viva the election of July 2, 2000! But, amid the toasts, it is also worth remembering that, in their day, the Mexican Revolution and its Institutional Revolutionary Party created riches of a kind the United States has never known.

PAUL BERMAN

PAUL BERMAN is author of *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (W. W. Norton).

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Crevices

SOMETIME AFTER HE retired from the presidency in 1817, James Madison composed a miscellany of reflections that he called "Detached Memoranda." The manuscript is a small masterpiece of detachment, not least for the wisdom with which it treats the inflamed subject of religion and the American state. Madison observed that the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, which was drafted by Jefferson in 1777 and became law in 1786,

> is a true standard of Religious liberty: its principle is the great barrier against usurpations on the right of conscience. As long as it is respected & no longer, these will be safe. Every provision for them short of this principle, will be found to leave crevices at least thro' which bigotry may introduce persecution; a monster, that feeding & thriving on its own venom, gradually swells to a size and strength overwhelming all laws divine & human.

We are now in a season of crevices. In Texas, George W. Bush designated June 10 as Jesus Day. "People of all religions," he explained, "recognize Jesus Christ as an example of love, compassion, sacrifice, and service." In Colorado, the state Board of Education has voted to urge schools to post the motto "In God We Trust" in classrooms. The governor supported the recommendation on the grounds that it "reflects an underlying belief that's been consistently expressed over 200 years in the United States—that we do trust in God." And in Washington, Justices Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas dissented from the Supreme Court's ruling that school-sponsored prayer at a high school football game violates the Establishment Clause by spitefully remarking that the decision "bristles with hostility to all things religious in public life."

In truth, the decision expresses no such hostility; but a little bristling in defense of the secular character of democracy may be in order. Usually the bristling is done in the name of tolerance. We do trust in God, as Governor Owens says—except those of us who do not trust in God, and they do not deserve to feel like pariahs in their own polity. Here is Madison's monster. But again, tolerance in America seems pretty sturdy these days. American democracy is not exactly crumbling before American religion. No, there is another reason to be vigilant about the crevices. It is not the common liberal reason, but it was the Founders' reason.

The Founders did not worry only about the damage that religion may do to politics. They worried also—they worried mostly—about the damage that politics may do to religion. And not only the Founders: in 1992, in *Lee* v. *Weisman*, Justice Kennedy articulated this valuable American worry when he observed that "the First Amendment's Religion Clauses mean that religious beliefs and religious expression are too precious to be either proscribed or prescribed by the state." Yet the really striking thing about the religious critics of the separation of church and state in America is their indifference to such a worry. How can a believing Christian not be offended by Bush's designation of June 10 in Texas as Jesus Day? He proclaimed June 11, the day after Jesus Day, to be The Spirit of Americans with Disabilities Act Torch Relay Day. And it is not as "an example of love, compassion, sacrifice, and service" that Jesus commands the worship of Christians, it is as the Son of God; which is why, for believers, every day is Jesus Day. The tribune of the Republicans did not glorify Jesus, he cheapened Jesus. It is the certain fate of religion in the public square to be trivialized. "In God We Trust" is on all our coins, but the ubiquity of the affirmation has not led to any sharpening of the soul or the moral sense. Instead God is dropped into parking meters and vending machines throughout the land.

A faith that requires the support of a government is an infirm faith. In almost all the other realms of life, conservatives regard the American government as impotent or injurious; but in the realm of religion, they want the government on our backs. Clearly they fear for their ability to secure and to transmit their traditions in the absence of such external support. If they demand an invocation of Jesus at a football game, and the rights of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, godless people, and thoughtless people be damned, it must be because the invocations of Jesus at home, and in church, and in voluntary associations (including school clubs), are proving inadequate; and so they must pretend that what stands in the way of their Christian life are the rights of non-Christians. The Establishment Clause is their alibi.

Liberals are wrong to interpret these crevices as evidence of religion's strength. They are evidence of religion's weakness. And the believers are wrong not to recognize that the freedom from religion is also the freedom for religion. No law and no government impedes them from finding their God, and from teaching their children to find their God, in their books, in their prayers, in their rituals, in their good works, in their houses of worship and their houses of study, in the immensity of the sky and the infinity of the sea. They will flourish, or they will not flourish, according to the spiritual quality of their exertions. Politics is too puny to get in the way of the most exalted meanings. ■

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REPRESENTATION OF THE INTELLECTUAL

AFP

The photograph reproduced above was taken by an Agence France Presse photographer on July 3 at a place at the southern frontier of Lebanon called Fatma's Gate. It shows a visitor from America gleefully throwing a rock at the Israeli soldiers on the other side of the border. The rock thrower is Edward Said. The tender professor's act of violence was accompanied by a homily, in which he remarked about the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon that "nothing of this magnitude has happened in my lifetime." The speech was noteworthy for a number of reasons: The man who wrote during the war in Kosovo that Bill Clinton "should be indicted as a war criminal as much as Milosevic" now asserted that "what we saw last year in the war in Kosovo" is proof of "the right of every refugee to return to the house from which he was expelled"; and the man who has never missed a chance to denounce Samuel Huntington's theory about the "clash of civilizations" now proclaimed that "we are in a clash of civilizations.... This clash must be escalated not only with weapons, but also by the ideal, rational, and scientific weapons." The publication of the picture of Said's own contribution to the escalation of the clash of civilizations appears to have caused him a measure of embarrassment, and he issued a statement of extenuation: "For a moment I joined in. The spirit of the place infected everyone with the same impulse, to make a symbolic gesture of joy that the occupation had ended. I had no idea that media people were there or that I was the object of attention." It is reassuring to learn that if he had noticed the camera, Said would have stifled his spontaneous expression of solidarity with Hezbollah. It is also reassuring to learn that it was not a rock that Said threw, it was a symbol. (Good thing nobody was hurt.) Said concluded his explanation with the assertion that his toss of a stone cannot be compared to "the enormous ravages and suffering caused by decades of [Israeli] military occupation and dispossession." Of course not: In Said's almost childishly simple reading of modern history, what could possibly be compared to that? But there is one thing with which Said's coarse act can be compared, and that is the purity that he has claimed for his own activity as an intellectual. He has made a career of defining a high, romantic ideal of intellectual life and heroically adducing himself as an example of his definition. Said is always accusing those who disagree with him of "the treason of the intellectuals." They are "fawning"; whereas he, the "exilic intellectual," is "speaking the truth to power." Except that at Fatma's Gate the exilic intellectual was not speaking. He was throwing a rock. It would appear that the throwing of a rock is another "mode of intellectual intervention." The good news for the hypocrite in the baseball cap is that *The New York Times* did not see fit to publish this revealing image in its pages; in the paper of record Said may still shine as an exquisite, wounded soul distracted by politics from art. The valiant dissenter thunders interminably against the peace process, but really he longs for nothing so much as an improvement in the quality of the orchestra at the New York City Ballet.

FACE TIME: As the conventions near, political bigwigs in both parties are kvetching that there aren't enough precious prime-time speaking slots to go around. And then there's Paul Harris. After receiving an invitation to speak on opening night of the Republican convention, Harris, a state legislator from Virginia, admitted he was "speechless" about the "terrific honor." Harris, in addition to the many other qualifications that vaulted him above the higher-ranking GOP officials vying for consideration, is, of course, black. As a letter to Harris from Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson explains, speeches should be "fast-paced [and] media-oriented, with brief, easy-to-understand messages. With few exceptions, all remarks will be limited to about three minutes, and we will provide a speechwriter for you." Come to think of it, don't even worry about the speech. Just show your face.

BLINDED BY SCIENCE: Readers may recall that last year TNR complained that one reason the global warming debate remains fractious is that so much of it is conducted by "scientists" who are actually paid advocates or lobbyists ("Warming Up," by Gregg Easterbrook, November 8, 1999). The right trots out scientific-looking studies from the George C. Marshall Institute and the Global Climate Coalition, two partisan groups with fixed anti-reform agendas. The left, meanwhile, touts people like Michael Oppenheimer of Environmental Defense (formerly the Environmental Defense Fund), whom the media, particularly *The New York Times*, insists on identifying as a "scientist"—even though he has

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no faculty affiliation and is a full-time employee of an advocacy organization with a fund-raising interest in greenhouse alarm. Now the *Times* has outdone itself. Last week not one but two columns by Bob Herbert on global warming were sourced to Oppenheimer, not only quoting him extensively but promoting him from "scientist" to "chief scientist" of ED. "Chief" scientist of a partisan organization—presiding over a staff of other "scientists," presumably? It is inconceivable that the *Times* or any other large news organization would credulously quote and identify a paid staffer of, say, the American Petroleum Institute as a "scientist." Scientists work at universities or laboratories; people on the payrolls of groups like ED and API are advocates. The first category produces light; the second produces, well, heat.

HEAVY MEDDLE: In May, George W. Bush appeared before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and launched a broadside against the Clinton administration. Clinton, Bush charged, was more interested in burnishing his legacy than in securing a meaningful peace for Israel. "America should not interfere in Israel's democratic process," the Texas governor instructed. "In recent times, Washington has tried to make Israel conform to its own plans and timetables. But this is not the path to peace." Maybe someone should tell Richard Perle, a former Reagan administration assistant secretary of defense who's now serving as a top foreign policy adviser to W. According to the July 12 *New York Post*, Perle sent a diplomatic cable to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak this week urging Barak to "walk away" from the Camp David summit with Yasir Arafat unless Arafat agreed to resolve the status of Jerusalem. Perle's concern for Jerusalem was touching. But the real motivation for the cable—not to mention the fact that Perle was writing it at the behest of the Bush campaign—became clear when he went on to instruct Barak that Israel "should not permit" Vice President Al Gore to take part in the summit. Evidently the Bush campaign's plans and timetables dictate that there be no Middle East peace deal before November. ■

VINT'S WEEK

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Is Lazio a lefty?

Construction of A Conservative

By IRA STOLL

TAKE A QUICK tour of Minna Atlas's Brooklyn apartment and you get a sense of the quirks of federal housing policy. Atlas, 73, hasn't worked since she immigrated to America from Moscow in 1994. She is not yet an American citizen. Yet the federal government has set her up—and hundreds of others like her—in a brand-new one-bedroom apartment in New York City, with rent fixed by government subsidy at an astonishing, below-market rate: on average, about $200 per month. Atlas's seventh-floor apartment comes complete with elder-friendly amenities like grab bars in the bathroom, handrails in the corridors, and even a hot-lunch program that dishes out kosher cuisine—gefilte fish, soup with kreplach, and Israeli salad—for a token, voluntary contribution of 50 cents per meal.

It's enough to inspire resentment from those missing out on this sweetheart deal—including your correspondent, who pays five times as much for a smaller apartment in a basement elsewhere in Brooklyn. And not only are my tax dollars subsidizing Atlas, so are the taxes of my 84-year-old grandfather, who also happens to be an immigrant from Russia (he came here in 1929) and who still works part-time to help pay to have amenities like shower grab bars installed in his Florida condominium unit. The program that provides Atlas with her apartment, Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly (named after the section of the 1959 Housing Act that created it), is a classic example of inefficient, arbitrary big government—the kind of thing you'd expect Democrats to sheepishly support and Republicans to crusade against. But, in fact, the Clinton administration tried repeatedly to cut back funding for Section 202 between 1995 and 1998 and might well have succeeded were it not for the efforts of one man: Representative Rick Lazio, the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate from New York.

"When this proposal came from the administration to zero out the Section 202 program, I called Rick immediately.... He essentially overturned the administration's position," says William Rapfogel, director of the Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty, a charity that has received over $35 million in federal grants since 1995 to build more than 500 apartments like Atlas's. Nancy Hooks, director of housing policy at the New York Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, is also grateful to Lazio. "He was instrumental in getting some of that funding placed back into the program," Hooks gushes. "Working with him has been so advantageous."

When Lazio replaced New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani as Hillary Clinton's Republican opponent in May, it was widely assumed that the race would follow a fairly conventional liberal-versus-conservative story line. Certainly that has been the hope of Clinton's campaign, which has tried to tie Lazio to the Gingrich-era Republican leadership in Congress. But, while the press has obsessed about Lazio's occasional willingness to stand with his party on abortion and gun control, it has largely overlooked what Rapfogel and Hooks have long known: He's a big spender. On economics, Lazio is more liberal than Giuliani and, in some ways, more liberal even than the administration of the woman he is campaigning against.

In 1998, for instance, Lazio joined such liberal Democratic stalwarts as Representatives John Lewis, Henry Waxman, and Rosa DeLauro in sponsoring the Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Act, which opened the door for increased government spending on women's health. Another recent Lazio bill provided $2.5 million for the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets—spending that Arizona Senator John McCain, then a presidential candidate, singled out as pork. Last year, Lazio opposed a Republican-led effort to cut $2.1 million from the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts.

But nowhere has Lazio's big spending been more evident than in his defense of the Section 202 program, for which, as chair of the House subcommittee that deals with housing, he waged a public battle. Lazio press releases boasted of his defense of the program and assailed the Clinton

GLENN HEAD

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administration's proposed cuts. "Unfortunately, over the past four years the administration has repeatedly proposed cutting millions of dollars from these programs," Lazio said in a December 1998 statement to the *Forward*. "We in Congress have successfully fought tooth and nail to ensure that the highest possible spending goes to these programs." As Rapfogel puts it, with some understatement, "There are a lot of ironies here."

Chief among them is the fact that the Clinton administration wanted to transfer the money it would save by cutting Section 202 into a voucher program to help low-income seniors live wherever they wanted, the kind of market-based reform most Republicans love. The Hudson Institute's John Weicher, who served as assistant secretary for policy and research at the Department of Housing and Urban Development during the Bush administration, says studies in the early '80s showed that giving people vouchers to use on the private market is 50 percent cheaper than subsidizing the construction of new units, as Section 202 does. Lazio, however, sided with the nonprofits that build Section 202 units, arguing that only specially built housing could provide the senior-friendly perks—shower grab bars, nutritionally correct meals, onsite blood-pressure screening—that end up saving the government money on Medicare in the long run. But it's hard to believe that such savings could offset the cost of building thousands of new units. And, besides, similar savings could be achieved within a voucher system—through meals-on-wheels initiatives, grab-bar-installation programs, and the provision of onsite social and health care services at private apartment buildings. A voucher system would also spread government help to other eligible seniors who weren't lucky enough to win the lotteries that determine Section 202 housing, many of whom are struggling to cover the rent on dilapidated cold-water walk-ups.

LAZIO'S POSITION ON Section 202 isn't an aberration. On housing, the issue to which he's devoted the most legislative energy, Lazio is liberal almost all the time. While shepherding through Congress a massive overhaul of federal public housing law, the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998, Lazio abandoned a conservative-backed plan to impose time limits on public housing assistance. "That was the result of his figuring out a way to get along with the two quite powerful liberal Democrats on the committee, Barney Frank and Jesse Jackson Jr.," opines Howard Husock, a contributing editor at the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal*, who supported the time-limit proposal. In the same bill, Lazio also yielded to liberals who wanted to make sure Section 8 housing-assistance vouchers targeted the very poor.

All of which creates the potential for delicious ideological jujitsu, in which Hillary Clinton rallies taxpayer outrage at the boondoggle of federally funded $200-per-month apartments in New York City. Don't hold your breath. An aide to Clinton says the first lady "supports the Section 202 program, and she's not for eliminating the program or anything like eliminating it." In other words, though Clinton supported welfare reform and has made modest efforts to position herself as a New Democrat, there's no way she'll hit Lazio's vulnerable right flank on housing reform. What a pity. The Clinton administration's original plan to shift Section 202 funds into housing vouchers made a lot of sense. Too bad neither the administration's first lady nor her supposedly pro-small-government opponent is willing to defend it. ■

Jerusalem Dispatch

A Separate Peace

By YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

IN A PRIVATE conversation with recently resigned Interior Minister Natan Sharansky shortly after becoming prime minister of Israel, Ehud Barak said his goal was the creation of a Palestinian state in 50 percent of the West Bank. Until about a month ago, when the Israeli press leaked details of the Stockholm talks, it was widely assumed that no Israeli leader would dare offer Yasir Arafat more than 75 percent. This week, as Barak and the Palestinian leader meet at Camp David, both numbers are far too low to even merit discussion. What was once inconceivable is now inadequate.

There are essentially two deals Barak can make, and neither is acceptable to the Israeli public. He can give in to Arafat's non-negotiable demands: Accept the principle of full withdrawal from the West Bank (which means compensating the Palestinians for settlement blocs with territory inside Israel); accept some form of refugee return; and, most important of all, recognize Palestinian sovereignty over the Old City of Jerusalem (excluding the Jewish Quarter). In exchange, he would receive a declaration by Arafat that the conflict is over. Or Barak can accede to most, but not all, of Arafat's demands: Withdraw in stages from about 94 percent of the West Bank without offering additional territory within Israel, accept limited "reunification of families" without agreeing to the principle of the right of return, and give the Palestinians control over outlying Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem and on the Temple Mount but retain full Israeli sovereignty over the Old City. In exchange, he'd receive a continuation of the peace process—and of the conflict.

The first deal would provoke open revolt. After all, during the 1999 campaign, Barak promised to ensure that Jerusalem would remain united under Israeli rule. "Rabin liberated Jerusalem, and Barak will protect her," went the slogan. But Arafat won't end the conflict unless Israel dismembers Jerusalem. So Barak can bring home a deal that promises peace but violates his most solemn commitment. Or he can gradually yield most of Israel's bargaining chips in exchange for a vaguely worded formula intended to convince the Israeli public that the conflict is nearly over while reassuring the Arab world that it is not.

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If Barak chooses the first option, he will be following the advice of his chief negotiator with the Palestinians, Internal Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami. Although Ben-Ami publicly adheres to Barak's cautionary position, privately, according to a well-connected source, he believes that in principle Israel should withdraw entirely from the West Bank, to the border of June 1967, just as it has on the Egyptian and Lebanese fronts. In practice, that means that if Israel does retain any settlements, it must compensate the Palestinians with land inside Israel proper. What's more, Ben-Ami backs Palestinian sovereignty over most of the Old City. The minister's support for maximalist Palestinian demands is hardly surprising: he is a professional capitulator. A favorite of the Israeli press because he is an intellectual, a Sephardi, and a dove, the former history professor and diplomat has made a career of appeasing pressure groups. He helped sell Barak on the disastrous coalition with the ultra-Orthodox Shas, promising an illusory alliance for peace between traditionalist Sephardim and secular Ashkenazim. And he negotiated last year's shameful surrender to Islamic fundamentalists in Nazareth, agreeing to build a mosque adjacent to the city's holiest Christian site, the Basilica of the Annunciation, because Christians, unlike Muslims, wouldn't riot.

DURING THE STOCKHOLM talks, Ben-Ami privately complained that Barak wasn't being "generous enough." Barak believed Israel wasn't legally obliged to withdraw to the 1967 border because a Palestinian state had never existed; therefore Israel wasn't required to compensate for settlement blocs with Israeli territory. But then, the day before he left for Camp David, Ben-Ami turned euphoric. He had just met with Barak, he told a confidant, and believed an agreement was imminent: "There will be no second or third summit. He's ready to settle now." Barak, said Ben-Ami, had accepted the principle of almost total withdrawal, with settlement blocs exchanged for Israeli land. On the refugees, too, Barak was ready to make a deal, perhaps 100,000 returnees over a 10- or 15-year period. Still, Ben-Ami told Barak that even those concessions weren't enough and that he needed to emulate Rabin's recognition of the PLO with an equally bold gesture: recognizing Palestinian self-determination in the Old City. Barak remained noncommittal.

But, despite Ben-Ami's enthusiasm, it's hard to imagine that Barak will endorse his negotiator's maximalism at Camp David. The much more likely deal is the second—an almost-final-status arrangement that creates a Palestinian state on most of the West Bank and in suburban Palestinian neighborhoods that will be detached from municipal Jerusalem, in exchange for a pledge by Arafat to keep talking rather than shooting. That would let Barak reassure the Israeli public that he has kept Jerusalem more or less united, and it would let Arafat tell the Palestinian public that he gave nothing in return. Still, Israelis would find it hard to accept that a deal on Jerusalem, which until recently had been touted as the bottom line—including a Palestinian flag on the Temple Mount—wasn't the end after all but merely an interim solution.

There is, of course, a third option. Barak could adhere to his previous position—a final deal that offers most but not all of the West Bank and some Jerusalem suburbs in exchange for an explicit end to the conflict. A majority of Israelis would support that compromise, but it is entirely theoretical: Arafat would not agree, and the summit would fail. Both the Israeli army and the Palestinian police are now training for that possibility. Palestinian leaders have threatened mass marches into settlements and Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem; Palestinian refugees in Lebanon could try to cross the border into Israel.

It wasn't supposed to turn out this way for Barak. The withdrawal from Lebanon wasn't meant to happen unilaterally but as part of a deal with Syria, which would have isolated Arafat and forced him to make greater concessions. Barak, by contrast, was to face Arafat as head of a powerful coalition ranging from the ultra-hawkish National Religious Party to the ultra-dovish Meretz. In fact, the reverse has occurred. Arafat, emboldened by Syrian intransigence and Hezbollah's rout of Israel, has come to the summit determined not to compromise. Barak, meanwhile, is the most enfeebled Israeli leader ever to try to negotiate peace. Instead of co-opting Benjamin Netanyahu's outsiders' coalition of Sephardim, Russians, and ultra-Orthodox into a government of "everyone," as he repeatedly put it, he is left with his nightmare: a coalition of the secular Ashkenazi left wing dependent on the Arab vote.

The result is that no matter what happens at Camp David, Barak will have to abandon one of his most cherished goals. No Israeli leader ever placed greater emphasis on national unity, yet if Barak negotiates a deal under these circumstances, it may well strain Israeli society to the breaking point. If he rejects Arafat's ultimatum, his role will be no less tragic: the prime minister who vowed to end the 100-year Arab-Israeli conflict will instead have proved that compromise with the Arab world, for now, is impossible.

When he was elected prime minister, Barak set out to finish the work Yitzhak Rabin began. And he knew that to do so, he had to learn from Rabin's mistakes. Crucially, he resolved not to repeat Rabin's disastrous taunting of his right-wing opponents; instead, Barak tried to empathize with their fears. Unlike Rabin, he seemed to understand that he couldn't make peace with only half the country behind him. Yet now he is doing precisely that, aiming for the most far-reaching deal in the country's history with barely a coalition. He failed because in one essential way he was too similar to Rabin to break from his mentor's mold: he too is a loner, convinced that only he is smart enough to be entrusted with war and peace. He refused to involve most of his Cabinet in the peace process, and now he is negotiating without its support. The leader who insisted that Israelis make peace among themselves before making peace with their neighbors couldn't even make peace with the ministers in his own government.

As Barak sat in parliament last Monday for a humiliating vote of no confidence just before flying to Washington, he wore a small, defiant smirk that said, I'll show you all what I can do. He survived the vote, but that bravado will not bring the Israeli prime minister the ultimate victory he craves. Indeed, it is the reason he has already failed. ■

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Why cheap AIDS drugs for Africa might be dangerous.

Take Your Medicine

By SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE

LAST WEEK'S INTERNATIONAL AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa, was a spectacularly glum affair. While angry protesters outside the conference railed against greedy pharmaceutical companies, delegates inside recited dismal statistics about the plague, each more alarming than the last. In South Africa, approximately one in ten adults is HIV-positive; in Africa as a whole, AIDS now takes three times as many lives as the next most common cause of death. Of all the depressing numbers, there was only one that health officials felt confident about changing any time soon: the $15,000 it currently costs to treat just one person with anti-HIV drugs for a year.

The reason is something called "tiered pricing" or "equity pricing," a concept that UNAIDS, the United Nations agency dealing with AIDS, began promoting recently and that elicited considerable excitement in Durban, even winning the endorsement of Bill Gates. Under the scheme, Western pharmaceutical companies, like Merck and Glaxo Wellcome, would set different prices for drugs in rich and poor countries. The same pill—say, AZT—could be sold for $4 in New York but only 40 cents in Johannesburg. With tiered pricing, Africans could finally afford the anti-HIV medicines they desperately need, and drug companies could still turn a reasonable profit.

A great idea? Actually, no—at least not by itself. What the enthusiasts seem not to realize is that without adequate health care networks to monitor their distribution, potent new medicines are worse than useless; they're dangerous. Consider Russia's recent experience with anti-tuberculosis drugs. In the 1990s, physicians in the former Soviet Union unleashed a torrent of anti-tuberculosis drugs on the population. The drugs were great, but the patients taking them weren't adequately supervised; in many hospitals, as many as 50 percent of patients strayed from the prescribed regimen. Soon, upwards of five percent of patients in some Russian clinics began to exhibit a strain of tuberculosis completely resistant to all drugs. Subsequently, millions of dollars had to be spent to contain the deadly strain. As Dr. C. Robert Horsburgh, a public health expert from Boston University, recently warned in the *Journal of American Medicine*, "The genie of multi-drug-resistant TB [was] irreversibly out of the bottle."

The HIV genie is even more ominous. HIV's secret—one reason the wispy virus is now a continent-hopping Goliath—is that it mutates rapidly, quickly becoming resistant to drugs. If anti-HIV drugs are not taken properly—a missed capsule here, a forgotten pill there—a low level of viral reproduction continues within the body. And the viruses brewed while the anti-viral medicines are still present in a patient's system can be especially lethal, as they are selected to carry mutations that render them resistant to the original drug. Even in the United States, where an excellent health care network monitors most drug regimens, about ten percent of patients already harbor HIV strains resistant to AZT, the most common anti-HIV drug. And if such potent drugs are dumped unsupervised on Africa—where health care networks cannot afford to be as vigilant—then a virulent, drug-resistant strain of HIV may emerge very quickly and could even boomerang back to the West.

FORTUNATELY, THERE IS an alternative to the solution hyped last week in Durban. Since the safety of anti-HIV drugs depends on a country's health care infrastructure, pharmaceutical companies could pay to develop in Africa some of the infrastructure necessary to make sure their anti-HIV drugs are taken properly.

Why would drug companies do something so altruistic? Because it's not altruistic at all. After all, drug companies can only squeeze profits out of Africa by selling Africans their anti-HIV drugs over a long period of time. Right now, with about 22 million Africans infected with HIV, the demand for anti-viral drugs seems inexhaustible. But, if a viral strain immune to a company's drug emerged, the drugmakers would no longer have medicine Africans wanted to buy. Even worse, the resistant virus might spread into more profitable Western markets. Only by making an investment in health care infrastructure—and thus preventing drug-resistant strains of HIV from coming to life—can a pharmaceutical company ensure that its cash-cow drug isn't rapidly made worthless by new mutations.

Glaxo Wellcome, at least, seems to understand this. In May, the company announced it would enter an unusual collaboration with UNAIDS to make sure its discounted anti-HIV drugs would be sold only in selected areas—places that "address[ed] the health care infrastructure and drug distribution aspects" and where there was "access to safe and effective ongoing treatment" for HIV. Glaxo also agreed to foot some of the bill for building these infrastructures through direct training and technical support of AIDS advocacy groups.

No one can be sure the Glaxo-UNAIDS scheme will work, because nothing like it has ever really been tried. There isn't much precedent for such public and private collaborations actually creating safe environments for selling discounted drugs. But, then again, there isn't much precedent for a recalcitrant virus infecting whole swaths of an entire continent. HIV is so deadly because it is enormously resourceful, crafty, and even creative. To defeat it, we will have to be, as well. ■

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Campaign Journal

Mad Props

By Michelle Cottle

George W. Bush spends a lot of time on the campaign trail with ethnic minorities, which might seem odd. Candidates don't usually seek out people who vote for the opposition in large numbers. Al Gore doesn't stump in rural Idaho. You don't see Ralph Nader campaigning at auto shows. Pat Buchanan doesn't address the monthly meetings of the Teaneck branch of the Elders of Zion.

But, as George W. has tripped lightly from inner-city schoolyards to Hispanic-activist conventions, political pollsters and strategists have helpfully explained that Bush isn't reaching out to minorities at all. Rather, he is using them as a backdrop to speak to the voters he really needs: moderate whites. Call it the "ricochet pander." Friendliness toward historically oppressed groups that are unlikely to vote for you—blacks, Hispanics—is a good way to appeal to historically oppressed groups that just might—white women, Jews, Catholics, gays. Which helps explain why, even though W.'s approval rating among African Americans is only marginally higher than John Rocker's, the Texas governor showed up last week to speak to the NAACP's annual convention in Baltimore—and executed a particularly fine ricochet pander. The trick is to make the minority audience think you're a nice guy—which whites like to see—without actually engaging its agenda, which whites probably oppose. It's a delicate balance, and it requires adherence to several key principles.

Act comfortable. For a Republican—especially a born-to-the-manor, bred-in-the-South Republican—the first thing to remember when diving into a sea of nonwhite faces is to show no fear. Clearly, Bush has a head start in this department, having by all appearances spent his entire life in a state of permanent chumminess. But the opening moments of the NAACP event tested even W.'s capacity for cool. NAACP board member Frank Humphrey was halfway through welcoming George W. to the dais when he learned that the governor was "not quite ready yet." To fill time, Humphrey had the choir launch into song—at which point Bush wandered onto the stage, along with NAACP Chairman Julian Bond and President Kweisi Mfume. Once unleashed, however, the choir stops mid-song for no man. So, for a very long moment, Bush stood in the center of the massive dais looking disoriented, before launching a vigorous round of hand-shaking and settling into his seat.

The singing had barely ended when the yelling began. Four men and women popped up from their seats at the back of the ballroom, waving signs and admonishing the crowd to "remember Gary Graham," the convicted (black) murderer recently executed by the state of Texas on less-than-overwhelming evidence. "An innocent man was murdered by Governor Bush," squawked a smallish woman with a shockingly large voice. No amount of gavel-banging could quiet the quartet, and security was called in to oust them. During the ejection process, the choir was asked to sing. Again. And Bush was forced to twiddle his thumbs through two more numbers, as hundreds of eyes narrowed to see how he was weathering the disturbance.

All in all, he weathered it pretty well, managing to look serious but not miffed while the protesters were shuffled from the room, trailed by a handful of media. And, for the duration of the choral interlude, the governor appeared relatively unperturbed as he sipped his ice water, perused a (presumably convention-related) booklet, and chatted with Bond. When Bush finally took the mike, the smile on his face was warm and wide. Throwing an arm around the board member who had just introduced him, the governor said how honored he was to be in such esteemed company, before plunging into the next element of the afternoon's pander.

Acknowledge past disagreements. Right out of the gate, Bush broached the subject foremost in everyone's mind: He was not among friends. Thanking the crowd for its gracious welcome, the governor lowered his voice to a pitch that conveyed faux intimacy: "I've been looking forward to this," he said with an emphatic head bob. "I really have. I've been lookin' forward to comin' and tellin' you somethin'." He spent the next few moments somberly acknowledging, with diplomatic phraseology worthy of Camp David, that "the history of the Republican Party and the NAACP has not been one of regular partnership" and that "there's no escaping the reality that the party of Lincoln has not always carried the mantle of Lincoln." It was an apology that would have done Bill Clinton proud: no crimes were cited, no culprits fingered. But, by expressing his contrition for unspecified past sins clearly beyond his control, Bush cast himself as a thoughtful unifier, a sensitive soul, a feeler of pain. Then, misty pseudo-admissions out of the way, Bush moved on to pander step three.

Make no promises. Since Bush's real audience wasn't the folks assembled in the ballroom, he certainly didn't want to waste time addressing the issues—police brutality, the death penalty, racial profiling—on the convention agenda. Instead, he pretty much delivered his standard education stump speech, tailored to the African American audience through the addition of several warm and fuzzy, decidedly non-substantive passages about how far we as a nation have come in our fight against intolerance and bigotry—and how far we yet have to go. (Are you listening, Catholics? Jews? Lesbians? Vegetarians?) There was the usual talk of rallying the armies of compassion; vague, fleeting references to expanded health coverage and home ownership; and an exceptionally nonspecific pledge that "strong civil rights enforcement will be a cornerstone" of a W. administration. Knitting everything together with multiple references to Abe Lincoln, opportunity, hope, and children, Bush managed to deliver a relatively short, moderately gooey address that assured his real (i.e., remote) audience that he (like them) is

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a good-hearted nonracist who is liked by black people but has no intention of giving in to them on crime, affirmative action, and so forth.

On one level, this is progress. In the past, Republicans have preferred to use African Americans to show whites not that they have friends across the color line but that they have enemies. Call it the ricochet slap. It was not, after all, so long ago that Bush père made Willie Horton a household name. But, even in W.'s kinder, gender approach, the candidate still wasn't really speaking to black Americans—a fact that was not lost on the convention audience.

As the candidate left the dais (no extended post-speech grip-and-grin with this crowd), the woman sitting to my left—one of the few black faces in the media section—announced to no one in particular, "That was *terrible*." Swiveling toward me, she continued: "He didn't say *anything*." It was not an uncommon reaction. "He did not cover any of the direct issues we're covering at the conference," said Stephanie Brown, president of the NAACP chapter at Howard University. "Personally, I feel like he didn't really address anything," said Nalette Wooten, president of the organization's Ohio State University chapter. "It's purely symbolic."

It was, in other words, a complete success. Bush gave the NAACP nothing and got from the group everything he wanted—a day's worth of smiling photos and sound bites, another brave example to cite as part of his "unprecedented" minority-outreach effort. For months, civil rights activists have accused Bush of using black schoolchildren as political props while scrupulously avoiding contact with black leaders and advocacy groups who might ask uncomfortable, probing questions about "compassionate conservatism." But, with his speech to the NAACP, Bush found a way to use the activists as props, too. The group, in its eagerness for a GOP presidential candidate simply to "respect [them] with his presence," as one board member put it, gave W. the perfect audience off which to bounce his ricochet. While hundreds of overwhelmingly liberal African Americans listened politely, Bush spoke on his own issues, offered no concessions, and fielded no questions.

It was, ironically enough, a photo negative of this winter's Democratic debate at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. There, in a raucous question-and-answer environment, black journalists and audience members largely set the agenda, and Al Gore and Bill Bradley reacted to it. Call it a reverse ricochet, in which African Americans used the white candidates to bounce their concerns onto prime-time television.

Bush's NAACP speech, by contrast, is now largely the property of his campaign, which can spend its advertising millions framing the event however it pleases. In fact, shortly before W. took the stage, campaign media strategist Mark McKinnon trooped into the ballroom with a video camera on his shoulder and set up shop at the far end of the media risers. Odds are that between now and Election Day, some Bush campaign ad will appear, featuring footage of attentive NAACP audience members as evidence of the candidate's inclusive appeal. Somehow, I suspect that the Gary Graham "murdered by Governor Bush" episode won't make the final cut. ■

The quiet coalition to rehabilitate Qaddafi.

Engagement Ring

By LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

OILMEN HAVE FEELINGS, too. Take the industry executive who lobbied the White House last year to lift the ban on U.S. corporations doing business in Libya. When National Security Council officials rejected his plea, he broke down and wept. The Libyans, he sniffled, were a gentle people. They deserved better. White House officials offered him a tissue.

That was then. If proponents of warmer relations with Libya are shedding tears today, they are tears of elation. Quietly, fitfully, but unmistakably, America's hard line toward Muammar Qaddafi is crumbling, replaced by a policy of incremental rewards and blandishments. The softening is part of a larger Clintonite charm offensive with respect to rogue states—but, unlike the recent overtures toward Iran and North Korea, the Libya shift is, for the most part, taking place behind closed doors; neither Bill Clinton nor Madeleine Albright has spoken of it in public. No one, after all, wants to incur the wrath of the families of the 189 American victims of Pan Am Flight 103.

But, whether the families know it or not, the influence they once had on U.S. policy is slipping away. Consider a few of the past year's developments. To persuade Qaddafi to hand over two suspects in the 1988 Pan Am bombing for trial, the United States approved a letter from U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, which pledged that the trial would not be used to "undermine" the Libyan regime and quietly dropped the demand that it be held in either America or Great Britain. When Qaddafi complied last April, the United States promptly backed the de facto lifting of U.N. sanctions against Libya. A few months later, the administration granted waivers for four U.S. oil companies—Amerada Hess, Conoco, Marathon, and Occidental—to survey Libyan

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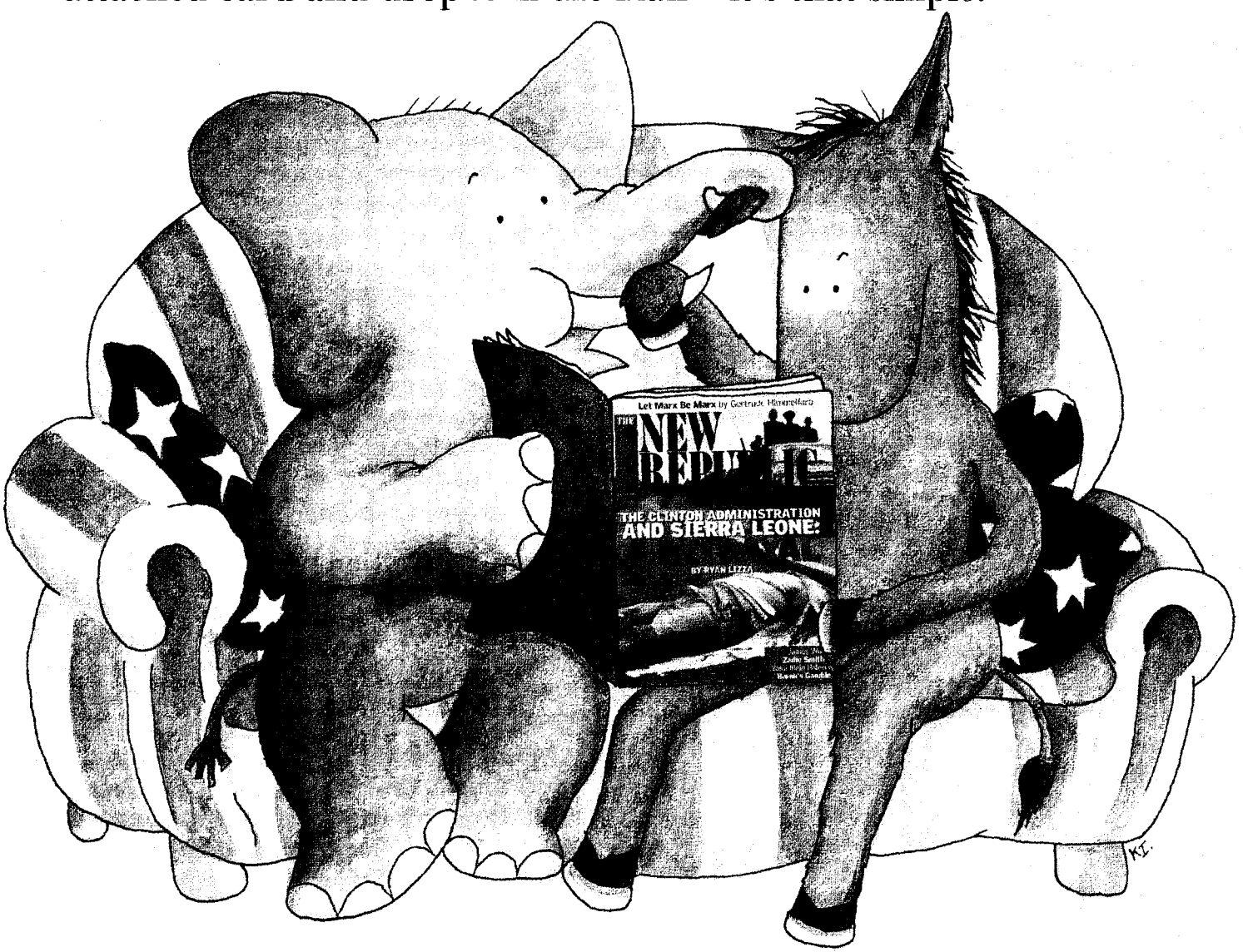

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oil fields. It also permitted U.S. agribusiness executives to travel to Tripoli to negotiate contracts and authorized the sale of thousands of tons of wheat to Libya. Soon afterward, the State Department itself dispatched a team to assess whether the long-standing ban on travel to the former rogue state (recently reclassified as a "state of concern") should be abandoned. "Change can now be imagined," Ronald Neumann, the State Department's point man on Libya, advised in a little-noticed speech last year. "Libya is not Iraq. We do not seek to maintain sanctions until there is a change of regime in Tripoli."

ROBERT NEUBECKER

Neumann's explanation is straightforward. "We have seen definite changes in Libya's behavior: specifically, declining support for terrorism and increasing support for peace processes in the Middle East and Africa." It is also unpersuasive. True, Qaddafi hasn't blown up an airplane lately. But, in his ongoing efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction and his continued ties to an alphabet soup of terrorist organizations, Qaddafi remains very much the man President Reagan dubbed "the mad dog of the Middle East." As for his "support" for the Middle East peace process, its depth may be gleaned from, among other things, denunciations of Israel that would make even Saddam Hussein blush. And then, of course, there is the unresolved matter of the 189 Americans his minions murdered.

None of this, however, seems to have made the slightest impression on Washington's new Libya lobby—a chorus of thirsty oil executives, retired diplomats for hire, "can't we all just get along" Clintonites, and State Department Arabists, all of whom contend that Qaddafi has atoned amply for his past indiscretions. Their reasons for promoting rapprochement with Libya range from the sheer acquisitiveness of the oil industry to the administration's conviction that diplomatic carrots almost always achieve better results than wielding the big stick. And their efforts to rehabilitate Qaddafi are paying off.

THE MOST CYNICAL member of the coalition is the oil industry, which until recently had been sheepish about pressing for warmer relations with Qaddafi. But, emboldened by signs of diplomatic rapprochement, a parade of oil lobbyists has been bombarding the White House with requests to lift unilateral sanctions—offering to arrange audiences with Libyan officials for U.S. congressmen and even, in some instances, conducting their own foreign policy.

Thus far the effort has yielded only waivers to inspect oil fields, but industry spokesmen like Conoco CEO Archie Dunham predict that a "window of opportunity" will open next year. To exploit it, oil interests have pressed into service a collection of former high-ranking government officials with connections both at the State Department and in the Arab world. Perhaps the most prominent is Herman Cohen, a former assistant secretary of state who now runs a consulting firm with clients hoping to do business in Africa. Cohen is sanguine about the prospects for closer relations with Tripoli. Asked whether the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 poses an insurmountable barrier, he replies, "There's insurmountable and there's insurmountable.... To hold out for a change of regime will put a halt to progress." Cohen's business partner, James Woods, who handled Libya policy at the Pentagon during the '80s, is more broad-minded still: "Shooting down Pan Am 103 was unacceptable. But so was shooting down the Iranian Airbus." The victims' families, he predicts, "will have to settle for what they settle for."

But if Cohen tells Americans uncomfortable truths, his message for Qaddafi is less confrontational. Cohen visited the dictator last year on behalf of then-client Kamel Ghribi, a Tunisian-born oil tycoon and associate of Qaddafi's. A memo written by another of Ghribi's U.S. consultants described the visit:

> According to Mr. Ghribi the purpose of our visit was to be thanked by the Leader [Qaddafi] for our efforts made to break the Pan Am 103 deadlock. He credited us with helping to persuade Abdullah Senussi [a Qaddafi sidekick who has been convicted in absentia by a French court for blowing up a French passenger jet] and others that the delivery of the two accused was in the best interests of Libya.... Cohen opened the meeting by congratulating the Leader for his courage and wisdom shown by delivering the accused PA 103 bombers for trial. He encouraged the Leader to take full advantage of the dialogue with the United States through the channel recently opened at the U.N. by the U.S. government and the Secretary-General.

Qaddafi responded to this suggestion by launching into a rant against Israel's influence on U.S. policy, one with which, according to the memo, "neither Ambassador Cohen nor I attempted to argue."

Nor is Cohen the only former assistant secretary of state whom Ghribi has retained. Robert Pelletreau, who handled Near East affairs in the Bush and Clinton administrations, has also offered his legal services, along with advice on, for example, how Libya might improve its image during the Kosovo conflict. Pelletreau has advice for Americans, too. "[T]he loosening trend evident in U.S. policy during 1999,"

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he observes in a monthly report for companies doing business in the Middle East, "indicates that alert energy companies can and should be preparing for the day when the door is again open for them to operate in [Libya, Iraq, and Iran]." Other Libya boosters put it even more bluntly. "We have oil interests and the potential to make more money," says Milton Viorst, an American journalist who has traveled to Libya to interview Qaddafi. "If we don't go in and make the money, the Germans and French will do it for us." As for the families of those killed above Lockerbie, Scotland, Viorst adds, "It won't serve our interests to have our Libya policy determined by a grudge. We cannot allow one organization to be the determinant of Libya policy."

In fact, the Pan Am 103 families aren't the only "organization" with an interest in Libya policy, as Viorst well knows. He, along with Cohen and a gallery of former U.S. officials and academics sympathetic to Qaddafi, has participated in the newly formed U.S.-Libya Dialogue Group. The group, which has met with current and former Libyan officials, aims to inform Americans about the "New Libya" and recommends "getting past the Lockerbie issue," according to one of its members. Though ostensibly sponsored by a Dutch university, U.S. officials and even some participants suspect the organization acts at the behest of the Libyan government. "The group's travel expenses—their airfare, hotels, everything—are bought and paid for by Qaddafi," says Ray Takeyh, a Libya expert who received an invitation to join the organization. Indeed, the U.S. government prohibited Americans from attending the group's most recent conference in—where else?—Libya.

BUT, FOR ALL its efforts, the oil industry has been less the engine of Libya policy than its beneficiary: the White House and the State Department are already one step ahead. The Clinton administration's inclination that trade and investment generally suffice to bring adversaries to their senses was reinforced, in the case of Libya, by pressure from U.S. allies. In spring 1998, British Prime Minister Tony Blair complained to Clinton in a telephone conversation that international support for sanctions against Iraq was eroding and counseled that, to hold the line against Saddam, the United States should ease another of its embargoes. A senior State Department official recalls that complaints from abroad (as well as from the president himself) that the United States had become "sanctions happy" created an environment in which something had to give. And, at the suggestion of the British—who were then in the midst of normalizing their own relations with Qaddafi—that something became U.S. policy toward Libya.

The rapprochement might have remained embryonic had it not been for the efforts of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Ronald Neumann. A former ambassador to Algeria and a principled advocate for better relations with the Arab world whose stand on Libya enjoys Albright's backing, Neumann makes no secret of his preferences. "Libya no longer poses the threat it once did," he explains, arguing that the best way to bolster the country's bid for redemption is through engagement. In theory, Neumann's enthusiasms should have been tempered by skepticism from the department's counterterrorism desk—after all, Qaddafi's lieutenants downed an American passenger plane. But the State Department's counterterrorism shop has long been a dumping ground for exhausted foreign service officers, and Christopher Ross, the office's director when Neumann began steering Libya policy—and, like Neumann, a former ambassador to Algeria (and Syria)—neatly fit the stereotype. (Ross left the government in late 1998, after his nomination to be ambassador for counterterrorism was pulled.) "Without Ross, Neumann would never have been able to push through his Libya agenda," says a White House official. And though Ross's successor, a former Special Forces officer named Michael Sheehan, is no proponent of closer relations with Qaddafi—his screaming matches with Neumann over Libya policy have become the stuff of legend at the State Department and the National Security Council—by the time he arrived on the scene, Libya had become the exclusive property of the Near East bureau.

STILL, THE STATE DEPARTMENT does not make U.S. foreign policy alone. At least, it is not supposed to. But the views of NSC officials didn't much matter, because the State Department kept them almost entirely out of the loop. As one NSC staffer put it, "We couldn't have disagreed with State more on Libya, but they never shared anything with us and, in the end, rolled right over us." In one case, NSC staffers assured families of the Lockerbie victims—and apparently believed themselves—that U.N. sanctions against Libya would merely be suspended, only to discover at the last moment that they would be effectively lifted instead.

But, if NSC staffers were misled by the State Department, some of them passed the duplicity on to the families of the Pan Am 103 victims. Steven Simon, then the NSC's senior director for counterterrorism, read the families portions of the U.N. letter assuring Qaddafi that the bombing trial would not be used to undermine his regime. When Qaddafi subsequently gloated that Libya's role in the bombing would not be examined at all, irate family members demanded a copy of the letter. The NSC, however, now claimed there was no longer any record of such a correspondence. Then it did exist but couldn't be found. Then it was located but, well, had been classified. Today, NSC officials, including National Security Adviser Sandy Berger himself, say they would like nothing more than to release the note to the families. But, regrettably, it's not theirs to release. The letter, you see, is a U.N. document.

At their most forthright, advocates of the Clinton administration's Qaddafi-friendly maneuvering defend the policy as an expression of hardheaded raison d'état. As Simon argues, "America has permanent interests, not permanent enemies." But surely America's overriding interest is the safety of its citizens. And, for regimes that monstrously violate that interest—say, by blowing up a U.S. airliner—permanent animosity is the only suitable response. The Libya engagers claim that competing interests—oil, geopolitics, international goodwill—matter more. But, then, those weren't their relatives blown out of the sky. ■

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Sierra Leone, the last Clinton betrayal.

Where Angels Fear to Tread

By Ryan Lizza

Even for the Clinton administration, it was an extraordinary lie. "The United States did not pressure anybody to sign this agreement," State Department spokesman Philip Reeker proclaimed at a press briefing in early June. "We neither brokered the Lomé peace agreement nor leaned on [Sierra Leonean] President Kabbah to open talks with the insurgents.... It was not an agreement of ours." Observers were stunned. The dishonesty, said one Capitol Hill Africa specialist, was "positively Orwellian."

Orwellian because the peace agreement signed in Lomé, Togo—an agreement that forced the democratic president of Sierra Leone to hand over much of his government and most of his country's wealth to one of the greatest monsters of the late twentieth century—was conceived and implemented by the United States. It was Jesse Jackson, Bill Clinton's special envoy to Africa, who in late 1998 pressed President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to "reach out" to Foday Sankoh—a man who built his Revolutionary United Front (RUF) by systematically kidnapping children and forcing them to murder their parents. In May 1999, the United States, led by Jackson, brokered and signed a cease-fire agreement between the government and the RUF. In June, U.S. officials drafted entire sections of the accord that gave Sankoh Sierra Leone's vice presidency and control over its diamond mines, the country's major source of wealth. U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone Joseph Melrose even shuttled back and forth between Lomé and Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, to cajole the reluctant Kabbah. In March 2000, after the accord was signed, American officials hosted repeated meetings at the U.S. embassy to carry it out.

Barely any of this made the American press. And then this May, when the RUF took hostage 500 of the U.N. peacekeepers meant to supervise Lomé's implementation—simultaneously detonating the agreement and catapulting it onto the front page—the United States washed its hands of the whole thing. Said Reeker on June 5, "We were not part of that agreement."

The Clinton administration's Africa policy will probably go down as the strangest of the postcolonial age; it may also go down as the most grotesque. In dealing with Africa, previous U.S. administrations were largely unsentimental. Africa was too poor to affect the U.S. economy, too alien to command a powerful domestic lobby, too weak to threaten American security. As a result, past presidents spoke about Africa modestly and not very often.

Not Bill Clinton. He has proclaimed frequently and passionately that Africa matters. He has insisted that black suffering has as great a claim on the American conscience as white suffering. He has vowed that the United States will no longer be indifferent. These words have borne no relation whatsoever to the reality of his administration's policy. Indeed, confronted with several stark moral challenges, the Clinton administration has abandoned Africa every time: it fled from Somalia, it watched American stepchild Liberia descend into chaos, it blocked intervention in Rwanda. But Clinton's soaring rhetoric has posed a problem that his predecessors did not face—the problem of rank hypocrisy. And so, time and again, the imperative guiding his administration's Africa policy has been the imperative to *appear* to care. Unwilling to commit American blood and treasure to save African lives, and unwilling to admit that they refuse to do so, the Clintonites have developed a policy of coercive dishonesty. In Rwanda, afraid that evidence of the unfolding genocide would expose their inaction, they systematically suppressed it. And in Sierra Leone, unwilling to take on a rebel group that was maiming and slaughtering civilians by the thousands, the Clintonites insisted that all the rebels truly wanted was peace and a seat at the negotiating table.

Abandoning Africans is nothing new. But the Clinton administration has gone further. It has tried to deny them the reality of their own experience, to bludgeon them into pretending that the horrors around them do not truly exist—so that they won't embarrass the American officials who proclaim so eloquently that their fates are inextricably linked to our own.

Sierra Leone, a former British colony whose capital was founded in the late eighteenth century by freed slaves, was a pretty nasty place even before the birth of the Revolutionary United Front. After an initial bout with democracy upon gaining independence in 1961, it slid into dictatorship and kleptocracy and stayed there through the 1970s and '80s—consistently

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A two-year-old victim of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

near the bottom in world rankings of infant mortality, per capita income, and life expectancy.

So the outside world barely noticed when, in 1991, a group of about 100 guerrillas launched a campaign to take over the country. But the RUF—backed by Charles Taylor, a warlord in neighboring Liberia—quickly established itself as a rather unusual rebel group. For one thing, it had no discernible political philosophy or agenda. For another, it was almost unimaginably brutal. Typically, RUF troops would enter a village and round up its children. Girls as young as ten would be raped. Boys would be forced to execute village elders and sometimes even their own parents, thus cutting themselves off from their past lives and beginning their absorption into their new rebel "family." Once children were conscripted, their loyalty was maintained through drugs—they were injected with speed, which numbed their sensitivity to violence and rendered them dependent on their adult suppliers—and violence. When conscripts tried to escape, RUF leaders amputated their limbs. Refugees even accused the RUF of cannibalism.

For several years after its initial invasion, the group terrorized the Sierra Leonean countryside, periodically closing in on Freetown and being pushed back by a succession of military dictators. And then, in 1996, something remarkable happened—a burgeoning civil-society movement, backed by the United States and led largely by women's groups, rose up against Sierra Leone's military overlords and cleared the way for the country's first presidential elections since 1967. The RUF did its best to keep people from the polls—chopping off the hands of would-be voters—but almost two-thirds of the electorate cast ballots nonetheless, electing as president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, a longtime U.N. official. After the election, hundreds of Sierra Leoneans danced outside the U.S. embassy in Freetown in gratitude for America's support.

The euphoria did not last long. In May 1997, 14 months after Kabbah's election, disgruntled government soldiers—known as "sobels" because of their collaboration with the rebels—staged a coup, forcing Kabbah into exile in Guinea. The coup leaders invited the RUF into their junta, suspended Sierra Leone's constitution, emptied Freetown's prison of its worst criminals, and literally held the city's residents hostage, placing artillery in the hills around the capital and threatening to bombard the civilians below if removed from power.

No one expected the United States to send troops to restore democracy; this was, after all, Africa. But it didn't need to. Nigeria, a country that long fancied itself the region's hegemon, already had its own intervention force in Sierra Leone under the auspices of an organization called ECOMOG, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group.

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While Nigeria, a country in perpetual economic crisis, spent some $1 million per day battling the criminal regime in Freetown, several mid-level State Department Africa hands began lobbying their superiors to request funds from Congress to bolster ECOMOG's work. But the administration refused, saying such a request was pointless because Congress would say no. And, while the Clintonites were right that the Republican Congress wasn't usually enamored of foreign aid, the struggle for Sierra Leone might have offered the administration an opportunity to put its vaunted commitment to Africa into action. Indeed, several sympathetic members of Congress—Republicans and Democrats—even urged the State Department to challenge Congress to rise to the occasion. But the challenge never came. "It was totally bizarre," says one person with knowledge of the internal squabbling. "A decision was made that the State Department was just not going to ask for it."

IN FACT, NOT only did the Bureau of African Affairs not request additional money from Congress, it didn't even spend the money Congress had already given it. For months, $3.9 million sat unspent in the bureau's budget for voluntary peacekeeping operations. In February 1998, ECOMOG liberated Freetown and restored Kabbah to power—proving that the RUF's child soldiers were no match for a bona fide adult military. As the rebels streamed back into the countryside, the Nigerians saw an opportunity to finish them off for good. But ECOMOG lacked the resources to take the war into the Sierra Leonean hinterland, and still no money came from the Clinton administration. "The only way they [ECOMOG soldiers] could eat is because the people of Sierra Leone gave them food and places to sleep," says one U.S. official. By spring, the window of opportunity had closed. The RUF, freshly resupplied by Liberia, was back on the offensive with a campaign of systematic killing, mutilating, and raping called Operation No Living Thing. In late May, long after it could have made a real difference, the administration finally allocated the $3.9 million to ECOMOG.

Nigeria, visibly tiring of its proxy war, began to look for a way out, and the United States faced an even starker version of the same dilemma it had confronted all along. It could make a major financial and political commitment, in conjunction with the Nigerians or others, to save a fledgling democratic government too weak to save itself. Or it could abandon that government, leaving Sierra Leone to Sankoh and his child butchers—because, after all, Sierra Leone did not remotely affect America's vital national interest. The Clintonites, typically, did neither. Against all the evidence that Sierra Leone could be saved from the RUF only through war, the Clinton administration set out to make peace. In early spring 1998, a group of U.S. policymakers gathered on the sixth floor of the State Department to plot strategy. One senior official summarized their goal: "We need to appear to be doing something."

To make peace with Foday Sankoh and the RUF, the Clintonites had to go through Sankoh's political godfather, Liberian dictator Charles Taylor. Taylor and Sankoh attended the same school—a Libyan secret-service camp known as al-Mathabh al-Thauriya al-Alamiya (World Revolutionary Headquarters), a sort of university for revolutionary guerrillas from all over Africa. When they met, Taylor had recently returned from the United States, where he had escaped from a prison in Plymouth, Massachusetts, while awaiting extradition back to Liberia on charges of embezzlement. Sankoh, imprisoned in the '70s for his role in plotting a coup, had been working as an itinerant photographer in the Sierra Leonean countryside. Each man dreamed of overthrowing his native government, and they pledged to help each other do so.

Taylor got his chance first, on Christmas Eve 1989, when he launched a civil war that would become a model for Sankoh's a year and a half later. One of Taylor's first military innovations was his creation of the Small Boys Unit, a battalion of intensely loyal child soldiers who were fed crack cocaine and referred to Taylor as "our father." Soon, refugees from the Liberian countryside began recounting stories of horrific cruelty. Taylor's soldiers were seeking out pregnant women and placing bets on the sex of their unborn children. Then they would rip open the women's wombs and tear out the babies to see who was right. Evidence of cannibalism also began to trickle out. One soldier told Reuters, "We rip the hearts from their living bodies and put them on the fire, then eat them." A Liberian human rights organization claimed cannibalism in Taylor-controlled territory was so widespread that "there is fear of persecution based on one's fitness for consumption." Taylor's own defense minister accused him of taking part in the practice himself.

BY 1991, LIBERIA looked a lot like Sierra Leone would look seven years later. Troops from ECOMOG defended a weak government in the capital, Monrovia, while Taylor controlled the other 90 percent of the country. Taylor developed a vast warlord economy, selling off Liberia's minerals and raw materials, trafficking in hashish, and reportedly reaping an annual income of about $250 million. But he wanted to expand his lucrative empire even further—to include the diamond mines just across the border in Sierra Leone. What's more, he wanted revenge against Sierra Leone, which had served as a base for the ECOMOG troops that were preventing his total victory in Liberia.

So he kept his deal with Sankoh. In March 1991, a number of Taylor's fiercest fighters accompanied Sankoh and the fledgling RUF into Sierra Leone, where they headed straight for the diamond mines. Taylor appointed Sankoh "governor of Sierra Leone," and his soldiers jokingly referred to Sierra Leone as their Kuwait. Sankoh frequently visited Taylor at his headquarters in the Liberian town of Gbarnga.

And then in 1996, with Liberia in ashes and 13 failed peace agreements—"[Taylor] reneged on all of them," says a former senior State Department official—Taylor offered his Sierra Leonean protégé the ultimate lesson in the politics of terror: he took power. Taylor agreed to stand for election. He had the largest army and the most money, and he made it clear that if he did not win, he would resume the killing. A country exhausted by war elected him president. During the run-up to the vote, Taylor's child soldiers took to the streets,

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JESSE MICHEL DUCILLE/WASHINGTON POST

Jesse Jackson and Liberian President Charles Taylor breakfasting in Monrovia in May.

chanting what became his unofficial campaign slogan: "He killed my pa. He killed my ma. I'll vote for him."

TO BRING "PEACE" to Sierra Leone, the Clinton administration first had to show that Sankoh and Taylor were men with whom one could legitimately do business. "Their whole policy was to 'mainstream' them—that was the word used by someone at State," explains an aide to the House International Relations Committee. "'If you treat Sankoh like a statesman, he'll be one.' ... [A State Department official] used the term to explain what they had done with Taylor and what they were trying to do with Foday Sankoh." In Jesse Jackson, appointed "Special Envoy for the President and Secretary of State for the Promotion of Democracy in Africa" in October 1997, Washington had the ideal man for the job.

Jackson first met the Liberian dictator on an official trip to West Africa in February 1998. Taylor, worried that Jackson, like prior American diplomats, would hector him about human rights, invited an old Liberian friend of Jackson's named Romeo Horton to brief him on America's new envoy. Horton says Jackson and Taylor's meeting went extremely well. "Instead of meeting an adversary," says Horton, Taylor "met a friend." The following month, when Clinton toured Africa, Jackson arranged a 30-minute phone call between the two leaders from Air Force One. Upon returning home, Jackson organized a conference on "reconciliation" for Liberians at his PUSH headquarters in Chicago. According to Harry Greaves Jr., co-founder of a Liberian opposition party, who attended the Chicago conference, "The message was, '[Taylor's] been elected, and let's give him a chance.' It's all about p.r., and Jackson is part of that campaign." As Leslie Cole, an old friend of Taylor's, wrote to the new president soon after Jackson's conference, "Getting Jesse on the bandwagon was a good and smart idea."

So it's not surprising that by the time Jackson began the diplomatic push that would lead to Lomé, he and Taylor were giving the same advice to the democratic government of Sierra Leone: Cut a deal with the RUF. In November 1998, Jackson traveled to West Africa again, meeting with Taylor and Kabbah in Guinea and then, in Freetown, with Kabbah alone. During his five-hour stop in Sierra Leone, Jackson, who arrived just days after fresh reports that the RUF was beheading children and disemboweling pregnant women, urged Kabbah to make concessions to the rebels. "The government must reach out to these RUF in the bush battlefield," Jackson told Sierra Leonean leaders. Much of Freetown believed otherwise. "Think again, Jackson, the RUF is not a civilised body to be trusted," implored one prominent newspaper. A local journalist asked Jackson why he was

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telling Sierra Leoneans to negotiate with the RUF when the public was against it. "I remember very clearly what he said," says Zainab Bangura, a prominent member of Freetown's democracy movement. "'That is what leadership is about: to mold public opinion, not to follow public opinion.'" Sierra Leone's current ambassador to the United States, John Leigh, remembers Jackson's trip well. "When he went to Sierra Leone in 1998," Leigh says, "what he was doing was pushing Charles Taylor's position."

Seven weeks after Jackson departed, as Bangura put it recently, "All hell broke loose." The "hell" was the January 1999 RUF assault on Freetown, which, hard as it is to believe, set a new standard for rebel atrocities. Capitalizing on ECOMOG's weariness, the RUF marched into the capital surrounded by a human shield of civilians that prevented the Nigerians from launching an effective counterattack. Divided into squads with names like "Burn House Unit," "Cut Hands Commandos," and "Kill Man No Blood Unit" (the last group specialized in beating people to death without spilling blood), the RUF burned down houses with their occupants still inside, hacked off limbs, gouged out eyes with knives, raped children, and gunned down scores of people in the streets. In three weeks, the RUF killed some 6,000 people, mostly civilians. When the rebels were finally forced from the city by an ECOMOG counterattack, they burned down whole blocks as they left and abducted thousands of children, boys and girls who would become either soldiers or sex slaves.

Incredibly, the Clintonites didn't abandon their efforts to "mainstream" the RUF in the weeks following the attack; they intensified them. In February, just weeks after the assault, the State Department hosted the RUF's "legal representative," Omrie Golley, for talks in Washington. While Golley was at the State Department, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Howard Jeter organized a phone call between him and Kabbah, establishing the first formal contact between the government and the rebels. Golley remembers the experience fondly. In contrast to the British, who he says treated his group with disdain, Golley gushes that he "was always very impressed with the American approach to the whole conflict."

GOLLEY ALSO MET with New Jersey Representative Donald Payne, probably the most important member of Congress on Africa policy. Within the Congressional Black Caucus, it is common knowledge that members take their cues on Africa from Payne. And, given the overriding importance of domestic politics—particularly domestic racial politics—on the Clinton administration's Africa policy, Payne wields substantial influence.

Among Capitol Hill Africa specialists, Payne's sympathy for Taylor and Sankoh is the stuff of legend. In February 1999, for instance, after his meeting with Golley, Payne wrote to Kabbah imploring him to pursue negotiations with Sankoh, who had been temporarily captured by the government and was actually awaiting execution for treason, even while the RUF continued the war. "[S]uccessful negotiations must be without precondition and include the permanent release of Mr. Foday Sankoh," Payne wrote. "That letter is exactly what Charles Taylor was saying at the same time in Liberia. He was saying Sankoh should be freed," says Ambassador Leigh. "That letter that Payne wrote to President Kabbah is exactly the type of agreement that the State Department pressed Kabbah to accept." And, indeed, Sankoh was released as part of the run-up to Lomé.

On the House Africa Subcommittee, where Payne is the ranking Democrat, both Republican and Democratic staff members say he has bashed ECOMOG and questioned whether Taylor was really aiding the RUF. In May of last year, Payne fought to remove from a resolution language accusing Liberia and other countries of supporting the rebels, even after the State Department formally acknowledged that Taylor "continues to actively support the rebels in Sierra Leone, including the provision of arms and ammunition." Says one Democratic aide, "Whenever there is talk of sanctioning Taylor or of threatening Liberia ... Mr. Payne is always the first one to jump to their defense." Former Liberian Ambassador to the United States Rachel Diggs says Taylor "had free access to Don Payne and Jesse Jackson ... whenever there was a problem, these were the people whose ear Taylor had in the U.S. and who had his ear in Liberia."

Indeed, Payne's relationship with Taylor goes back to the early '80s, when Taylor was in jail in Massachusetts and Payne, then a member of the Newark municipal council, spoke out against his extradition to Liberia. Payne says he was simply helping Taylor at the behest of a friend and didn't actually meet the Liberian until 1997, when he attended Taylor's presidential inauguration in Monrovia. But since then the two men have clearly become friends. One visitor to Payne's office tells of watching the congressman hang up the phone with Taylor and remark that the Liberian president had just told him he was tired of dealing with Jeter, the U.S. envoy for Liberia. (Taylor is known to dislike Jeter, once referring to him as a "burnt-out" diplomat.) Taylor suggested that Payne become the U.S. envoy instead. "What surprised me was that Payne didn't say anything," says the visitor. "He seemed flattered." Payne says he does not remember any such conversation. At one point, according to an associate of Payne's, the New Jersey congressman jokingly complained that he was getting so many calls from Taylor that he was tired of talking to him. Payne insists he has talked on the phone to Taylor no more than half a dozen times.

WITHIN THREE MONTHS of Golley's February 1999 visit to the State Department and the congressional offices of Donald Payne, the phone call initiated by Howard Jeter had led to a government/RUF cease-fire. With striking unanimity, Sierra Leonean intellectuals believe that Kabbah, a rather weak president, agreed to the cease-fire under pressure from Jackson and against the advice of some of his ministers and prominent members of civil society. Days before the cease-fire, Jackson and Kabbah met up in Ghana, where both were attending a conference. From Ghana, Jackson abruptly flew Kabbah to the talks in Lomé, Togo, where the cease-fire agreement was signed. One Freetown newspaper even re-

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ported that Kabbah was "kidnapped" by Jackson. "The story was," explains Zainab Bangura, "that he was kidnapped, because [Kabbah] went [to the conference in Ghana] with his finance minister and information minister"—at the time both men were thought to be against signing the agreement—"and they all went to the airport to go to fly to Lomé, and Jesse Jackson said there were no seats for them. So they didn't go."

The cease-fire paved the way for the Lomé peace talks themselves. And, once again, the United States took the lead. U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone Joseph Melrose was a constant presence at the negotiating table. "They oversaw the whole peace talks," says Abu Brima, who attended as the leader of a delegation representing Sierra Leonean civil society. "Melrose was very, very active and literally kind of led it, I would say." Bangura adds: "Every time the talks were about to fall apart, Melrose would fly over to Freetown to pressure the president." According to Leigh, Melrose's "job was to soften the Sierra Leonean delegation to accept the agreement." The Clinton administration even sent a technical team, led by a USAID official named Sylvia Fletcher, that actually drafted parts of the accord.

The final agreement at Lomé, signed on July 7, 1999, awarded the RUF four ministerial posts, made Sankoh vice president, placed him in charge of a new commission to oversee Sierra Leone's diamonds, and granted the RUF blanket amnesty for all crimes. After the agreement was signed, Fletcher and Melrose held meetings establishing the diamond commission—which included Sankoh, members of Kabbah's government, and representatives from De Beers and other diamond companies—at the U.S. embassy. As one U.S. government official put it, "The message we sent with Lomé is that you can terrorize your way to power."

FOR CLOSE TO a year, the Lomé agreement did what the Clinton administration hoped it would do. With articles on pages A17 and A6, respectively, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* announced the accord and ushered Sierra Leone off their pages—another peace process successfully brokered by an administration committed to the well-being of Africa. As Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice bragged last September, "the U.S. role in Sierra Leone ... has been instrumental. With hands-on efforts by the president's special envoy Jesse Jackson, Ambassador Joe Melrose, and many others, the United States brokered the cease-fire and helped steer Sierra Leone's rebels, the Kabbah government, and regional leaders to the negotiating table."

It probably wouldn't even have mattered that Sankoh refused to disarm—of the estimated 10,000 children fighting for the RUF, only about 1,700 were turned over to demobilization camps, as required—or that he continued the illicit diamond-trading that Lomé was meant to stop. If Lomé had simply unraveled quietly—even if Sankoh had followed his mentor in Liberia and grabbed complete power himself—it is unlikely that Sierra Leone would have made the American front pages. The Clinton administration would still have accomplished much of what it set out to do at that meeting on the sixth floor of the State Department in spring 1998.

But this May, in an ironic twist of fate, Sierra Leone leapt from the shadows into the world spotlight. Lomé had achieved one of the RUF's central goals—the exit of the stubborn Nigerians. The U.N. peacekeepers who took their place—sent from countries like India, Jordan, Kenya, and Ghana—were ill-equipped and bound by the timid U.N. rules of engagement. And, as soon as they ventured into the RUF's diamond heartland, the rebels stole their weapons and vehicles and held them hostage for several weeks. The humiliating standoff brought Lomé crashing down in full public view. And U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's desperate appeals for Western countries to send troops to reinforce his peacekeepers called global attention to the very point the Clinton administration had worked so hard to conceal: its unwillingness to sacrifice anything real on behalf of the people of Sierra Leone. Instead of soldiers, the United States once again sent Jesse Jackson. But, by this time, Jackson was so bitterly despised in Freetown that the Sierra Leonean government told him it could not guarantee his safety. One group of prominent Sierra Leonean democracy activists warned Jackson, "Our people will greet your presence in the country with contempt, and we'll encourage them to mount massive demonstrations in protest." During a conference call with Freetown leaders in which he tried to explain himself, Jackson was openly attacked as a RUF "collaborator." His trip to Sierra Leone was canceled.

TODAY, A YEAR after Lomé, the U.N. hostages have finally been freed. Foday Sankoh has even been captured and will likely be tried as a war criminal. President Kabbah's government is defended by a shaky coalition of citizen militias, government soldiers, former RUF collaborators, U.N. troops, and, most importantly, military advisers from Great Britain—the only Western power to heed Annan's call. Sankoh's apparent replacement has been given sanctuary in Liberia by Taylor, who continues to arm the RUF. The rebels still control much of the Sierra Leonean countryside, and there are widespread rumors of an imminent RUF attack on Freetown. If the British leave, an attack is all but certain.

At the National Summit on Africa in February, President Clinton said, "We can no longer choose not to know. We can only choose not to act, or to act. In this world, we can be indifferent, or we can make a difference. America must choose, when it comes to Africa, to make a difference." Sophisticated people understand what this kind of talk, coming from this administration, means. And the people of Sierra Leone, who now count prostheses as one of their country's chief imports, have become sophisticated. In fact, in recent months Sierra Leonean exiles in Washington have increasingly allied themselves with Republicans like New Hampshire Senator Judd Gregg. It's a remarkable turn of events, given that Gregg and his ilk are isolationists—men who say forthrightly that America has no important interests in Africa, can't successfully export its method of government there, and shouldn't waste blood or money trying. After eight years of the Clinton administration, it seems, the people of Sierra Leone no longer expect very much from the United States. They're willing to settle for truth. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Telling One's Truth

SOME QUESTIONS ARE built to last. No matter how they are assaulted with answers, they come up smiling—or glowering—and keep interrogating. In film, one of the hardiest perennials is the matter of factual liberties in historical pictures. Must historical films stick strictly to the facts? The simplest answer, insufficient even to some historians, is "yes." Two recent books (reviewed here) by historians addressed the question and found differing answers: *Visions of the Past* by Robert A. Rosenstone and *Past Imperfect*, written by members of the Society of American Historians and edited by Mark C. Carnes. Now comes a collection of essays on the historical films of one American director, with commentary and rebuttal by himself. And who could that director be but...

Oliver Stone's USA (University Press of Kansas, 360 pp., $34.95), edited by Robert Brent Toplin, is divided into three parts, "Framing the Debate," "The Films," and "Stone Responds." Stone's response to his critics runs to seventy-nine pages, and the first section contains an additional twenty-five of his comments—on his general treatment by the press and his views of himself and his work. So of the 298 actual text pages, one hundred and four are by the subject. (This scheme, of debate and dialectic, was also true of the fat volumes containing the *JFK* and *Nixon* screenplays.) Stone's complaints about the media's distortion of his comments verge on the naïve. Why should the media treat him more accurately than it treats anyone else? His defenses of his films against historians' criticisms are much more interesting. Because of the polemical nature of his work, he wants to be involved in the arguments about it—less because he thinks the work needs protection than because (we can infer) his films evoke just the kind of antipathy in some historians that he is intent on provoking and he has something further to say about it. In short, he is just as purposefully angry about his films as he is in them.

A few instances of pro and con comments: Rosenstone, one of Stone's firmest advocates (and Stone quarrels with *him*), says, in his italics, "*Historical film must be judged not on the level of detail but at the level of argument, metaphor, symbol.*" David Halberstam, as immersed in Vietnam experience as any journalist, sees *Platoon* not as metaphor but as fact: "I think [Stone] serves history well in *Platoon*, because his sense of what happened is so pure." (Stone was in the army in Vietnam and was wounded twice.) Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., himself a former film critic, says: "*Nixon*'s great defect is Stone's continuing compulsion to see history in terms of conspiracy." To which Stone later replies: "I think ... the professors of the world, when working in the beehive cells of government, have no idea of the complexity of covert operations going on parallel to their own activities." Michael L. Kurtz, an historian of the Kennedy assassination, contends that, whatever the faults may be in *JFK*, "With the exception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ... *JFK* probably had a greater direct impact on public opinion than any other work of art in American history." One result of that impact was the Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bush.

The back-and-forth tennis-match arguments of the book sometimes drag, but generally they imply major points not limited to those arguments. Unquestionably Stone played with facts or accepted unusual theories in his historical films because he believes that the generally accepted accounts are not the whole truth: but also, centrally and passionately, because he is haunted by the haunting of America, the specters of unease and doubt that Vietnam and the Kennedy murder and the Nixon disgrace brought to this country.

In any case—and this is neither cold nor warm comfort—it is gratifying that an American film artist has done work that needs such spirited discussion. A few of the discussants even manage to recognize the paramount truth about Stone: he is a very powerful, very imaginative film artist. That truth is so scantily touched in this book that compensation is in order. We've had so much talk by historians about the way filmmakers treat history that it may be time for a conference of film critics to discuss the way historians treat film.

A good topic for that conference would be **The Patriot** (Columbia), a rouser about the American Revolution that stars Mel Gibson. It begins in South Carolina in 1776, with Gibson as a prosperous farmer, a widower with seven children. He had served in the British Army in the French and Indian Wars and is now opposed to joining the rebel forces against Britain. Subsequent horrifying events change his mind, some thirty film minutes later, or there would be no story.

The bloody outrages against colonial civilians by British troops, shown here, are consonant with the record. (Unseen in the film: on the western frontier, which was then Kentucky and Ohio, the British engaged Indian tribes to help them pillage and massacre colonials.) I hope that all the historical matters in this screenplay by Robert Rodat are equally accurate: this would demonstrate the lesser importance of such accuracy in making an historical film, because *The Patriot*, factual though it may be, is a mechanical mess.

The screenplay is a heap of stale devices and familiar scene constructions. Sentimental: Gibson gives his deceased wife's locket to his daughter-in-law, which signals—like the girl's dress on an Indian brave in a Western—that it will turn up later in dire circumstances. Bravura: narrow escapes and survival of gory wounds are a matter of course. Technical: muzzle-loading muskets fire almost like machine guns. The plot moves toward a confrontation between Gibson and the British arch-villain. Furrow your brain and guess who wins. The last sequence, in which neighbors join to build a house for their friend, is just a wee bit hypersymbolic, especially when one of Gibson's slaves is included in the promise of the future.

Gibson strives for perspiring verity in his role, some effluvium to convince us that all this is happening to an actual human being. But it's uphill for him all the way. (Note: Gibson is also currently making an invisible appearance as one of the voices in the animation film *Chicken Run*.) That sturdy English actor Tom Wilkinson is adequately disgusted as General Cornwallis, and Jason Isaacs, new to me, is attractively frightening as a cold-blooded aristo British cavalry officer. Joely Richardson looks lovely, which is all that is asked of her, as Gibson's deceased wife's sister, who is probably going to marry him. (Was such a marriage ecclesiastically permitted?)

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Suppose Stone had made this film. Admittedly, the script of his last film, *Any Given Sunday*, a football yarn, wasn't high heavens above *The Patriot* in originality. But, as he did in the football picture, he would have worked here for ambiguities and contradictions in characters on both sides of the conflict, and even if it had meant reaching for some ignored aspect, he would have tried to show the American Revolution in an unexpected light. In any case, he would have burrowed his way to some unsettling mythos of the revolution.

Does this mean that the choice is always between plodding accuracy and brilliantly turned hypothesis? It would be grim to think the (persistent) question so pat; still, I cannot remember any classic historical drama that does not in some way tinker with fact. Just one example: in Kleist's great play *The Prince of Homburg*, young Prince Frederick dreams of heroic feats at the battle of Fehrbellin so that he can win a princess's love. In point of historical fact, at the time of Fehrbellin the prince was forty, married, and had a wooden leg. Take that, Society of American Historians! ■

Robert Brustein on Theater

A Berlin Diary

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY in Berlin invited me to that transformed city last week to talk to a group of journalists and intellectuals about what passes for federal arts funding in our country. As is commonly known, the German government provides the largest cultural subsidies of any nation in the world—as much as one hundred percent for some performing arts groups. Indeed, more public money goes to the opera in a single German city than to all the arts combined in our own parsimonious nation. But while American artists look longingly toward the superior generosity (and cultural awareness) of German legislators as compared with America's benighted politicians, my auditors were eager to learn more about what appeared to be our more "enviable" mix of private and public funding.

I tried my best to understand what there was about our system to envy—not an easy task while giving my boilerplate speech about the progressive disintegration of American culture in the wake of government neglect and private foundation agendas (the Martha Graham company being only the latest casualty of these bad policies). In Germany, where government funding had never been an issue before, it seemed odd to hear people complaining about how excessive subsidies were creating an atmosphere of dependency and waste among their artistic institutions.

One had only to use Berlin transportation to see the advantages of a well-organized and well-funded public support system. The U-Bahn (the subway) and the S-Bahn (the elevated) are not only extremely clean and efficient modes of transportation, they are also free. Try to imagine that: free! It is hard to convey the sense of exhilaration that comes from being able to travel anywhere in a city without passing turnstiles or being stopped by cashiers.

Still, I was not insensitive to the notion that too much subsidy obtained too easily could have an adverse affect on the arts. My last visit to Germany (it was also my first) was in 1964, when it was already becoming obvious that West Berlin was pouring its theater money into extremely lavish productions. I remember a *Marat/Sade* at the Schiller Theater that was conducted more like a Radio City spectacular than a serious philosophical play. By contrast, in Communist-dominated East Berlin—less a city than a perpetuated heap of rubble intended to remind people of the war—the relatively undersubsidized Berliner Ensemble was staging well-attended plays of relative simplicity and power, even though you could only get to the theater through that endurance test called Checkpoint Charlie.

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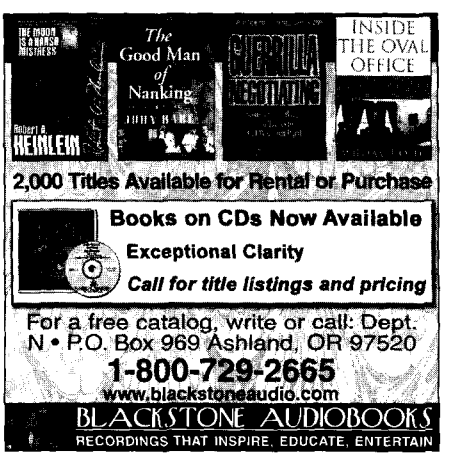
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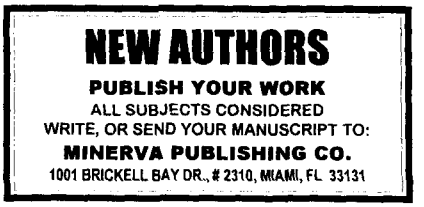
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six years, I was struck by how much had changed since the dismantling of the Wall. On the site of Checkpoint Charlie is now a museum dedicated to those who had escaped and to those shot while escaping by East German border police. Where there was once desolation, there is now luxury or at least the promise of luxury. The Hotel Adlon—a center of *luxe, calme, et volupté* before the war, when it was called the Kempinski—had suffered greatly as a result of the War, the Wall, and its proximity to the Brandenburg Gate. Now it is again resuming its place as perhaps the swankiest hotel in Europe. Architects from all over the world—including Richard Rogers, Raphael Moneo, Arata Isozaki, and others—are putting up huge cultural, commercial, and residential complexes in the once bombed-out Potsdamer Platz, according to a master plan designed by Renzo Piano. An enormous glass dome, designed by Norman Foster atop the Reichstag, allows you to survey the entire city, including the construction of a brand-new Bundestag. A striking Jewish Museum in Kreuzberg, designed by Daniel Libeskind, tries to recreate the monstrous oppression of the camps by means of a skewed series of metallic corridors resembling those in *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*.

If the streets of East Berlin still seem underpopulated with tourists or residents, the building sites are overpopulated with construction equipment. Everywhere you look there is a new building going up or an old one being renovated. Boat trips along the River Spree offer you vistas of cranes and derricks, towering over the land like pre-historic monsters. I imagined Disney or Spielberg making a movie in Berlin using back hoes as T-Rexes engaged in mortal combat with brontasauri bulldozers.

Not far from the river, in Berlin-Mitte, is the house of Brecht and his wife Helene Weigel, right next door to the cemetery in which they, along with some of their collaborators, are buried side by side. (Their marriage was not always as conjugal.) The museum suggests that Weigel, as well as being a great actress (she was the original Mutter Courage), was also a great cook and not a bad gardener. It also suggests how interested Brecht was in American literature—books by Faulkner, Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Whitman, Robert Penn Warren, and Saul Bellow appear in his library. Apparently, he continued to be interested in America, despite his flight to Communist Germany right after appearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The only papers in his monkish room, neatly arranged by his bed, are copies of the *International Herald Tribune*.

As for Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, it is no longer situated in what once seemed a no-man's-land, marked with warnings against *Fascismus und Militarismus*. The neighborhood of the theater—now called Bertolt Brecht Platz—is now a very comfortable one, presided over by a statue of the playwright smoking a cigar. That familiar image is one of the few remaining reminders that Brecht was the guiding spirit behind the Berliner Ensemble, as well as its principal playwright and director.

Following the recent death of Heiner Mueller, Brecht's theatrical heir and a fine dramatist in his own right, the theater, under its new Austrian artistic director, has developed a policy under which very few of the founder's plays will be performed. (Only one—*Arturo Ui*—was in the repertory during my visit.) Henceforth, the theater will be devoted to new plays by emerging talents and such middle-generation German writers as Krötz and Handke.

Still, East Berlin culture continues to be considerably more interesting than that of West Berlin, despite its comparatively depressed economy. While I was in West Berlin, the city was offering mostly operas—and, judging from *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Deutsche Oper, the productions are thoroughly conventional and conspicuously extravagant: brocaded period gowns, coiffured wigs, expensive props. If this is typical of German opera production (and I am told that Daniel Barenboim's Deustche Staatsoper in East Berlin is not a whole lot more adventurous), then such American companies as the Houston Opera and the Chicago Lyric shine by comparison.

On the other hand, most of the stimulating stage work during my admittedly brief visit was being performed in East Berlin, at such places at the Deutsches Theater, which has a permanent company, and at the Hebbel Theater, which is essentially a booking house. Interestingly, the Deutsches Theater on Schumannstrasse was the first place that the Berliner Ensemble performed before it settled into its own theatre. Unlike the current Berliner Ensemble, it still retains traces of its Brechtian origins.

Those traces were particularly evident in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Ein Sommernachtstraum*), a play by the author the Germans like to call *unserer Shakespeare* ("our Shakespeare"). In a new translation in rhymed couplets by the play's director, Jürgen Gosch (in collaboration with Angela Schanelec and Wolfgang Wiens), this *Midsummer* seemed more like a trauma than a dream—gross and earthy, carnal and animalistic. Performed on a bare stage defined by a black box, an orange floor, and a revolve that circulates a simple white-and-black geometrical figure, Shakespeare's most lyrical play begins with the appearance of a stocky, middle-aged burgher tootling on a pennywhistle. This is Philostrate, played by a splendid actor named Jürgen Holtz, who is later to remove his wig and clothes and transform into a bald, half-naked Puck (Theseus and Hippolyta, following the modern fashion, also double, as Oberon and Titania).

The lovers soon stumble on before Theseus, dressed in black trousers and white shirts and notable for their slatternly posture and protruding bellies. That this is not going to be a romantic interpretation of the play à la Max Reinhardt is an impression soon confirmed by the entrance of the rustics, dressed in black fedoras and black suits and behaving like demented versions of the Blues Brothers. These clowns have all been renamed: Peter Quince, for example, is now Peter Squenz, and Bottom is now called Klaus Zettel. And the performances, particularly Christian Grashof's cabaret take on Bottom (the actor is actually a dead ringer for Joel Grey), are so intimate in their downstage action that you can almost smell the actors.

Markus Moysen's Oberon is a fierce and hot-blooded demon in a long black wig and trailing black dress, and so is Katharina Linder as Titania, kissing and kicking her mate and biting his hand with the passion of an animal in heat. (Oberon himself is not above penetrating the sleeping Titania while squeezing the magic flower in her eye.) But it is Holtz's Puck that dominates the stage on every entrance. An aging elf in short pants, a bald gnome with flabby breasts, he has a relationship with Oberon that is by turns filial and fleshly, pressing his shiny dome against Oberon's naked belly for comfort, his arms around his waist, like some Breughel creature wallowing in Walpurgisnacht. And when he turns to the audience to exclaim "*Wie dumm diese Menschen bei*," he brings down the house.

Still, apart from Holtz's clowning, the humor of this production can get very heavy at times, and the lovers do not always succeed in lifting their scenes out of their customary tedium. (Holtz seems to recognize this when he vainly tries to prevent Hermia from finishing one of her longer speeches.) But it is a production in which I always felt in the presence of a genuine imagination and a well-trained company, and a theater spending its subsidies on artistry rather than show. If the German public is looking for reasons to maintain their current cultural policies, it doesn't have to look any further that the Deutsche Theater and its *Ein Sommernachtstraum*. ■

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Jed Perl on Art

Looming Large

ANNI ALBERS, WHO died in 1994, just short of her ninety-fifth birthday, was unique. In her greatest weavings, she achieves a mysterious dramatic intricacy; when she uses a particular type of cotton or wool thread, she gives that union of color and texture its own distinctive personality. In *Intersecting* (1962), white strands wander through the striped cloth, creating a dancing, exhilarating mood, a mood that catches on with orange and blue threads, too, until the whole weaving becomes a delicate, dizzying whirlpool. A composition such as *Intersecting* is a mesmerizing independent vision.

This is weaving, true enough—but *Intersecting* and many others of Albers's inventions have a visual complexity that we rarely associate with the work of a twentieth-century weaver. This is not to say anything against weavers or weaving. Quite the contrary. Albers does so much that you are left somewhat dazed by how little others have managed to do. There is something destabilizing about the unfamiliar poetic power of this artist. Gathered together in an exhibition that is currently at the Jewish Museum in New York, Anni Albers's weavings define their own stand-alone category.

Albers was an important teacher, an innovator whose impact was felt in the American textile industry, and the author of two widely admired collections of essays, *On Designing* and *On Weaving*. In her work you feel the clearheaded severity characteristic of a person who has mastered an exacting craft, but Albers is not held back by her punctiliousness. Her seriousness frees her. There is an appealingly self-indulgent side to this artistic personality that comes to the fore as Albers plays with beguiling textures and eye-filling colors and the occasional metallic thread. Albers has such an impassioned involvement with the primary facts of a weaver's métier—the rectilinear patterns, the intertwining threads—that these essentials provoke lyric explosions. She is a subtly audacious colorist. She is best-known for muted harmonies of grays, blacks, browns, tans, and cooled-down yellows, but she also has an instinct for explosive pinks, blues, oranges, greens, and golds.

There is not much that Albers doesn't know when it comes to inventing a magical world on a two-dimensional surface, and yet museumgoers may leave the Albers show with a feeling of unease. I suspect that this unease has something to do with our determination to avoid the old-fashioned typecasting that would relegate Albers to the lesser category of a craftsman. We say to ourselves that we have gone beyond those tired old debates about the relative merits of arts and crafts. Yet Albers doesn't let us off the hook. She goes so deep into the decorative conventions of the weaver's craft—conventions of rhythmic repetition, of symmetry and asymmetry, of order and surprise—that those conventions take on an ivory-tower disinterestedness. Some may want to blur the line between arts and crafts, and others may want to maintain a sense of distinct possibilities; but Albers gives craft traditions a fierce *artistic* integrity. She turns weaving into something new. When she invented the term "pictorial weavings" to describe the magnificent, relatively small-sized compositions that she did between the late 1930s and the early 1960s, she indicated that she had given weaving a visual autonomy, and she was absolutely right.

Thinking about Albers, you cannot but stumble over definitions. She herself knew the problem. In a lecture in 1961, she commented on the strangeness of being described, as she was on that occasion, as "an artist-craftsman." Thinking of "what craftsmen made centuries ago," she felt like "an unworthy latecomer." Yet she also felt that most of the objects that in her own day were categorized as "crafts" belonged "to a twilight zone, not quite art, not really useful, except—well, the exceptions." For Albers, the only way to move beyond these confusions was through a radical analysis of tradition. And that is exactly what you find in her work, where the long history of textiles vibrates and resonates, refracted through the insistently analytical imagination of a person who expects any art—painting, weaving, whatever—to yield emotional revelations.

One of Albers's most fascinating devices is the meandering thread: a thread that plays against the warp and weft, going its own way, and thereby becomes an image of freedom within constraint. It is as if she were saying, "In the beginning there was a single thread," and then musing on what that thread means to her. There is a back-to-the-sources explicitness about Albers's work, a love of fundamentals that she shares with modern artists such as Kandinsky and Klee, both of whom were at the Bauhaus when she studied there in the 1920s. In her work, a single thread can have the same primordial force that a dot has in a painting by Kandinsky or a rectangle of primary color has in a painting by Mondrian.

ALBERS EMBRACES THE literalness of her craft—and somehow metaphors emerge. She is reaching for the "infinite phantasy within the world of threads" that she admired in ancient Peruvian textiles. She creates beguiling imaginary realms; and since we are able to see exactly how her fibers weave the images together, we experience these fantastic places in a particularly keen, immediate way. Albers is attuned to all the images of spinning, of weaving, of looms that artists and poets have drawn on for thousands of years. She is a poet, but she avoids the clichés that have grown around the weaver's art, because for her what counts is not the symbolism of weaving, but weaving itself. The small size of many of her compositions—they are often not much more than a couple of feet high or wide—serves to magnify her effects. She finds emotional subtleties in the very process of making this or that piece of cloth out of this or that variety of fiber. She does not allude to Penelope or Ariadne; she takes up where they left off.

The overarching subject of Albers's pictorial weavings, which is so abstract as to be almost philosophical in spirit, might be said to be the mind's shifting allegiances to work and to play. The work is what Albers has called "the intricate interlocking of two sets of threads at right angles." The play registers in the bounty of textures and colors, of overlappings and transparencies that she incorporates into these elegant structures. She uses a wide variety of materials—cotton, jute, hemp, linen, wool, rayon, even cellophane—and mixes them in surprising ways. She suggests bemusement through the small, finicky adjustments in *Red and Blue Layers* (1954), with its twisted, criss-crossed little bundles of threads. In *Under Way* (1963), using bulky fibers, she builds a jumpy, fiercely charged atmosphere. And in *Pasture* (1958), the regular weave of the green fabric, punctuated by jots of red and white and deep blue, evokes an imagination that, while staying on an even keel, is never bored. Albers gives each step in the artist's decision-making process a carefully shaped dramatic point.

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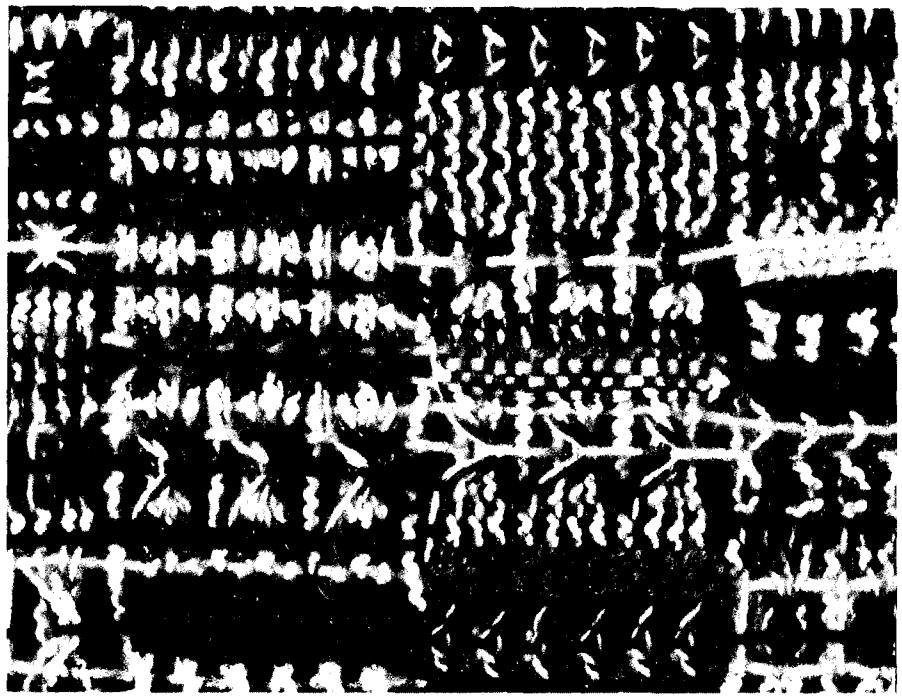

COURTESY THE JEWISH MUSEUM

Anni Albers, "Open Letter," 1958 (detail)

ANNI ALBERS WAS born Annelise Else Frieda Fleischmann in Berlin in 1899. Her family was well-to-do and extremely cultivated, and they did not think of themselves as Jewish until, as Albers later said, Hitler gave them no choice. Her parents encouraged Anni, the oldest of three children, in her artistic interests, and in 1922, on her second try, she was accepted by the Bauhaus, which was in its fourth year of operation. Although the school, then located in Weimar, had initially advertised a radically egalitarian approach to arts education, the reality when Anni arrived was that Walter Gropius, the founding director, was unhappy about the large number of female applicants, and was pushing women into the weaving program, whether they liked it or not. So Anni, along with other female students, put other ambitions aside at least for the moment, determined to be part of an art school which was coming to be recognized as the most exciting in the world.

Not long after arriving at the Bauhaus she met Josef Albers, eleven years her senior, from a working-class Catholic family. He had begun at the Bauhaus as a student, but was rapidly moving into a prominent position as a teacher. They were married in 1925, the year the school moved to Dessau. In 1930, Anni received her Bauhaus diploma, for a soundproof fabric developed for an auditorium in Bernau. By the time the Nazis had closed the Bauhaus for good in 1933, Josef and Anni Albers were beginning to be known in advanced artistic circles well beyond Germany. When an invitation came to teach at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, they accepted.

Anni Albers sometimes said ironically that the "Hitler business" had turned out rather well for her and her husband, in the sense that it had forced them to go to America, where they discovered several generations of artists, architects, craftsmen, and designers who wanted to see what could be done with Bauhaus ideas. Although Josef Albers knew no English on his arrival in the United States, he and his wife flourished in North Carolina, remaining there until 1949. Then Josef Albers went to Yale, where his color course became a model for arts education across the country. As a hard-edged, graphic look came to dominate the visual arts in the 1960s, the paintings in his *Homage to the Square* series were acquired by nearly every major museum of modern art. When Josef Albers died in 1976, he was a famous man. Anni Albers outlived her husband by eighteen years.

Albers was a virtuoso on the hand loom, but she was also very interested in innovations in industrial weaving. Certainly, she had an impact on the postwar revival of handweaving, which for a while became a sort of middle-class bohemian vogue. At the same time, she was admired by designers who were giving an increasingly sophisticated look to machine-made textiles. She had a show of her weavings at the Museum of Modern Art in 1949. Philip Johnson invited her to devise curtains for the Rockefeller guest house on East 52d Street, which she designed using a combination of cotton chenille, white plastic, and copper foil, for an effect that is described in the catalogue of the Jewish Museum show as giving "a calm appearance during the day that transformed into a sparkling surface at night." Some of her designs were put into production by Knoll and Sunar.

IF ALBERS WAS inclined to ignore the turf wars that often broke out between crafts people and industrial designers, this was surely because she saw weaving in a much broader context, as an ancient human activity that is related to some of the touchstone concerns of modern art. Albers had come of age at a time when progressive artists and art historians were thrilled to discover that abstract patterns and non-naturalistic forms could have an expressive power equal to any of the figure-based structures that had dominated European art since the Renaissance. Matisse learned how to give an emotional density to paintings by magnifying the intricate rhythmic moves that he found in all kinds of ornamental surfaces. Klee, another great artist for whom the art of North Africa and the Middle East was every bit as alive as the art of Europe, designed a course for the textile students at the Bauhaus. He wanted his students to reexamine the essential lessons of their craft—in symmetry and asymmetry, in interlockings and overlays, in directional pressures and color rhythms—but filtered through a modern artist's intensified consciousness.

Like many of the students and the teachers who were beginning to make names for themselves in the weaving workshop at the Bauhaus, Albers was a modern woman who hated to be boxed into a career that had an old-fashioned aura of women's work. Years later, she said that she found weaving "sissy" stuff. Yet Albers and a few others—especially Gunta Stölzl, who ultimately headed the weaving workshop—believed that if the very abstractness of textile design was now nourishing the great painters, then perhaps the weaving workshop, which Gropius saw as marginal, could be reimagined as essential.

The essays that Albers later collected in her books exude a kind of adventurous seriousness that I associate with the writings of Klee, Kandinsky, and Mondrian. She is fascinated by the act of creation, which she sees as related to an artist's responses to materials. In the opening essay in *On Designing*, she has this to say: "To restore to the designer the experience of *direct* experience of a medium, is, I think, the task today. Here is, as I see it, a justification for crafts today. For it means taking, for instance, the working material into the hand, learning by working it of its obedience and its

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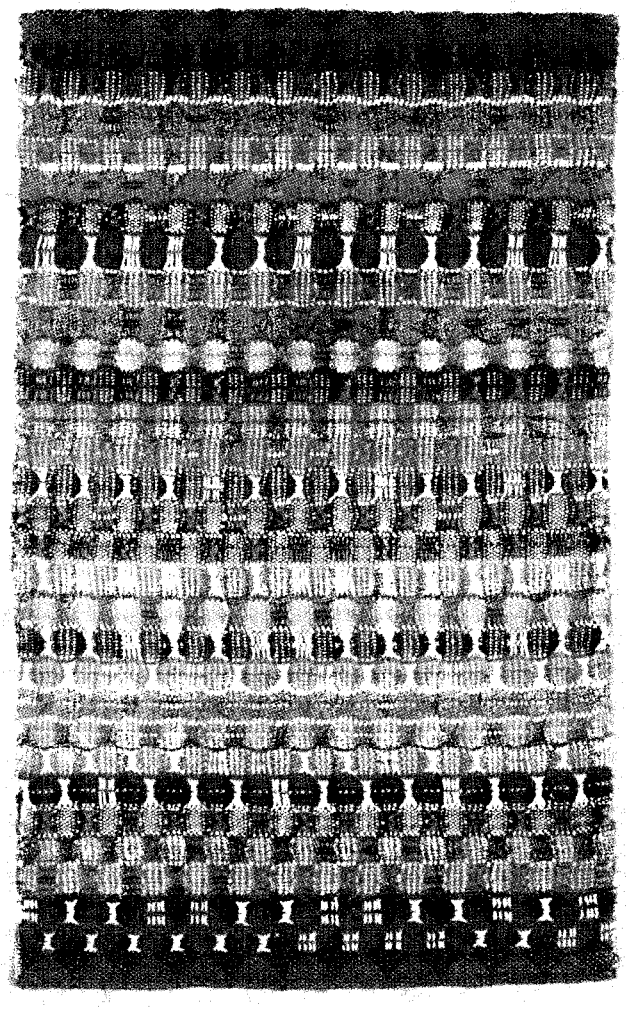
resistance, its potency and its weakness, its charm and dullness. The material itself is full of suggestions for its use if we approach it unaggressively, receptively."

In one of the essays in *On Weaving*, Albers describes all the different kinds of tapestry weaves—with interlocking wefts, and with sectional wefts turning around the same warp thread. We can see that for Albers these are not merely the fundamentals, they are also the verities, in the sense that the primary colors are for Mondrian, or the move from point to line to plane is for Kandinsky. Weaving, Albers argued, is "primarily a process of structural organization." And this, she observed, no doubt a bit wryly, was generally thought to be more a man's province than a woman's province. And yet, she pointed out, "in ancient myths from many parts of the world it was a goddess, a female deity, who brought the invention of weaving to mankind."

By the time Albers made this statement, in 1957, she was giving her textiles a romantic complexity. The experience of ancient Peruvian weavings was important: Albers must have responded to their quirky richness, their elaborate playfulness. And when she (and Josef) began to explore these native American achievements, they were not alone. A fascination with this Central and South American material runs through much avant-garde American art of those years—through Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and others. At Black Mountain, Albers would have been familiar with the Expressionist direction of advanced American painting, and the way that Klee, recognized at the Bauhaus as a Constructivist, was now admired by the Americans as an Expressionist. Her work of the Bauhaus years, those wall hangings with rhythmic organizations of rectangular blocks of color, had a slightly tamped-down emotional feeling; they are gorgeous but cool. In the United States, her view of weaving became more personal, more idiosyncratic—without losing any of her punctiliousness when it came to matters of craft. This is an artist who is not embarrassed about amusing herself.



Anni Albers, "Red and Blue Layers," 1954

THE ANNI ALBERS show, which has already been seen in several European cities, has received an attractively clean-lined presentation at the Jewish Museum, though the relatively limited space allotted to this important exhibition could have been used more wisely. True, the lithographs to which Albers devoted a good deal of her time late in life and which are her weakest work have been kept to a minimum. The late set of weavings called *Six Prayers* (1966–67) strikes me as somewhat strained—an overly self-conscious repetition of themes better treated earlier, on smaller formats—but it is certainly a part of the story that needs to be presented. Yet it is discouraging to see much of a room squandered on memorabilia—photographs of Anni and Josef, letters, catalogue covers, copies of magazines. I would have preferred that the fascinating samples of fabrics that Albers developed for industrial production had been arranged in a space of their own, thereby giving a full gallery to the Bauhaus hangings and later pictorial weavings that are her central achievements.

Albers deserves a bigger show than this, but there is no denying that the case has been made. The show's organizers—Nicholas Fox Weber (who is the director of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in Connecticut) and Pandora Tabatabai Asbaghi—have done a creditable job. Her work has an immediate appeal; or so it seemed on the several days that I visited the show, when there was a steady stream of visitors, mostly the middle-aged or older museum-goers who have for decades made up the Jewish Museum's core audience. These visitors, many of them women, may feel an immediate, instinctive connection with an artist who lived through a time of dramatic social change and took advantage of those changes, although not to the extent that she first hoped she might.

The biographical side of the story confronts us at the conclusion of the Anni Albers show. We see Anni in the kitchen. We see Anni receiving a degree. We see a number of jackets that she made or had made for her. We see some of the Peruvian textiles that she and Josef collected. This material is interesting, and there is no denying that the biographical-anecdotal dimension is becoming a popular element in recent retrospectives; there was a similar section in the Fairfield Porter show that recently closed in New York. But coming at the end of an exhibition that has given us a rare opportunity to take the full measure of Albers's work, this last room confuses things by leaving us with the humdrum facts of the story of Anni and Josef in our minds, facts which have nothing much to do with Albers's art.

And that is only the beginning of the problem. Even as social history, the pages-from-the-scrapbook presentation at the Jewish Museum is grievously inadequate. If you want to know what made this marriage tick, you have to understand it as a chapter in the larger story of how, beginning in modernist circles in Europe in the 1910s and 1920s, there was a series of marriages between artists who were making their marks—Robert and Sonia Delaunay and Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp immediately come to mind. The Delaunays and the Arps were close friends, and the women regarded one another's situations with particular interest and concern. Sonia Delaunay included work by Anni Albers in a 1924 anthology of textile designs, and Anni Albers reproduced a tapestry after one of Sophie Taeuber-Arp's watercolors in her book *On Weaving*.

When looking at these marriages, there is a temptation, which has not been

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avoided in the catalogue of this show, to emphasize their gossipy fascination—to linger on sticky matters of personal relations, to let nobody forget that after all is said and done it was probably the women who got the breakfast on the table (or told the servants to get it). These inequalities were real, of course. But to linger over them, or to insist that since the men were more famous they were the winners, is to deny that there was a moment when a new kind of art was mingled with a new kind of artistic camaraderie, when gender was not everything, when men and women were willing, despite their doubts or their equivocations, to approach a new artistic world together.

A formal language was shared in each of these marriages, and both partners contributed to that language in a way that will endure. Sonia Delaunay's early compositions combining words and images, as well as her late, boldly reduced paintings, have a frankly improvisational power. The subtle shifts among repeating forms in Sophie Taeuber-Arp's abstract paintings create a fascinating kind of drama, at once cool and surprising. And Anni Albers, in her weavings, almost single-handedly re-defined an art form. Each of these achievements is unlike anything else done by anybody else, and this includes the work that these artists' husbands did. And yet each of these women also participated in a movement of two, even if their husbands did not necessarily see it that way. Josef Albers, his wife said on at least one occasion, was not especially interested in her work. I do not doubt her. Yet the work did get done, her work as well as his work, and at what earlier point in history could that have been the case?

Albers was a radical of sorts. Her marriage may have been less than perfect, but in some respect it was a dream come true. And so are Albers's weavings, which might be said to liberate weaving from the straitjacket of functionalism. "Let threads be articulate again," she wrote in the catalogue of her show at MIT in 1959, "and find a form for themselves to no other end than their own orchestration." Albers makes this happen, with thrilling results. This woman who had seen in ancient Peruvian textiles "the magic of things not yet found useful" knew how to recover the uselessness of weaving, which is its abstractness, which is its modernity. Her textiles are celebratory. When Albers weaves dazzling fibers together, the juxtapositions have a lucid, resonant power—a percussive power, a kind of visual equivalent to the syncopated rhythms and the distinctive sonorities of drums, cymbals, and clapping hands, all filling the air. ■

Let Marx Be Marx

By GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB

Karl Marx: A Life by Francis Wheen

(W.W. Norton, 431 pp., $27.95)

I.

A FAMILIAR QUIP HAD it that the only place where Marxism was still alive and well was in the American university. But even there it has fallen upon bad times, unable to compete with the latest fashions: gender studies, cultural studies, all the varieties of postmodernist studies. Even postcolonial studies have only a remote relationship to Marxism, having been psychologized, personalized, postmodernized. Any self-respecting Marxist must be disheartened by this anarchic state of affairs. But even a non-Marxist may be nostalgic for a Marxism—for "classical" Marxism, that is—that has an intellectual rigor lacking in the current "studies," and that has received a good deal of rigorous analysis by serious scholars. And now we have a new biography of Marx that will make some of us still more nostalgic for the Marxism of old.

Francis Wheen's biography has received enthusiastic reviews in Britain, where it was published last year, and now in the United States. It is, as the English say, a good read—light, breezy, chatty, witty. The word "witty" appears in almost all the reviews. If you find it witty to hear Hegel or Marx repeatedly referred to as "the old boy," or Marx's mother as "that redoubtable old buzzard," or Bakunin as "this fat, toothless giant," or Marx, when charged with revolutionary conspiracy, as being "in the soup right up to his bushy eyebrows"; or if you are amused by the comment on Marx's ambivalence toward the bourgeoisie that "the middle classes—can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em," or by the comment on the English attitude toward the Continent, "a strange and savage place where the natives piss on your shoes and eat garlic in bed"; or if the chapter titles—"The Little Wild Boar" (Marx at the university), "The Mouse in the Attic" (*The German Ideology*), "The Shaggy Dog" (*Capital*), "The Rogue Elephant" (Bakunin), "The Shaven Porcupine" (the aged Marx)—delight you with their cuteness; or if you are untroubled by the author's contempt for almost everyone else who has written on the subject (Leszek Kolakowski, for example, who had the temerity to suggest that Marxism is not scientific, thus "placing another lump of hard cheese in Karl Popper's old mousetrap")—then this is the book for you.

WHEEN IS IDENTIFIED on the jacket as a columnist for the *Guardian*, but it is the voice of the frequent contributor to *Private Eye* that is all too often heard in this book. In his introduction, Wheen tells us that he proposes to "rediscover Karl Marx the man," unlike the thousands of books, almost all written by "academics and zealots for whom it is a near-blasphemy to treat him as a figure of flesh and blood." In fact, there is very little of Marx the man for Wheen to "rediscover," the thousands of books, by academics and zealots alike, having made us familiar with most of Marx's afflictions, eccentricities, peccadilloes—and worse. In re-telling the story, the *Private Eye* Wheen is in his element, for so much of Marx's private life lends itself to this kind of mockery.

It is perhaps to relieve the tedium of the recurrent, and depressing, themes in Marx's life that Wheen adopts this joshing tone. There are, for example, Marx's well-known carbuncles, which were a perennial torture to him but become something like comic relief in this book as they reappear at critical junctures of his life. Or there is the endless cadging from relatives and friends—from Engels especially, who stole petty sums from his family firm to support Marx—unaccompanied by any serious attempt on Marx's part to find employment. When he did undertake paid assignments, from the *New York Daily Tribune* and, later, the *American Cyclopaedia*, the articles were often written by Engels. And the gifts of money were invariably squandered, leaving him and his

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB's most recent book is *One Nation, Two Cultures* (Knopf).

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family bereft and seeking yet more handouts.

Or there are the repeated, acrimonious quarrels with those who ventured to differ with him or, more often, with whom he found cause for disagreement. Marx generally vented his displeasure in bitter polemics, but his contempt for bourgeois law did not deter him from instituting a libel suit against one critic (which he lost) and threatening to do so against another. Even more bizarre were his challenges of duels. He himself never actually fought a duel, but one of his admirers did on his behalf and was wounded, only to find himself, shortly afterwards when he displeased the master, reviled in the usual fashion.

Or there is Marx the "devoted family man,"—devoted, that is, in his own fashion, to his wife and children. He frolicked and picnicked with his daughters, read and declaimed to them his favorite passages from Shakespeare, and was genuinely concerned about their well-being. Yet he had no regard at all for his own mother, brothers, or sisters, whom he publicly ignored and privately derided. Psycho-biographers have speculated about whether this animus was a species of self-hate, an attempt to distance himself from a family irredeemably tainted by Judaism. Marx's paternal grandfather and great-grandfather had been rabbis of Trier, and his mother's father was the rabbi of the town in Holland where she was born. Wheen tells us that Marx's father converted to Christianity before Karl was born, leaving the impression that his children were born and raised as Protestants. In fact, Karl was six when he was baptized, and his mother was converted the following year, after her father's death.

For whatever reason, as a youth and an adult, Marx made no secret of his dislike for his mother, an unassuming woman whose life was entirely devoted to her family. He was somewhat more tolerant of his father, a cultivated, well-educated, moderately prosperous businessman who was notably generous to his son, in affection as well as money. Yet when his father died, while Marx was still at the university, he did not bother to attend the funeral. A letter (quoted by other biographers but not by Wheen), written by his father a year earlier, captures the spirit of the elder Marx and is remarkably prophetic of the younger one.

> I feel myself suddenly invaded by doubt and ask myself if your heart is equal to your intelligence and spiritual qualities, if it is open to the tender feelings which here on earth are so great a source of consolation for a sensitive soul; I wonder whether the peculiar demon, to which your heart is manifestly a prey, is the Spirit of God or that of Faust. I ask myself—and this is not the least of the doubts that assail my heart—if you will ever know a simple happiness and family joys, and render happy those who surround you.

If Marx was unappreciative, even contemptuous, of his own family, he was respectful and proud of his wife's. One does not know whether this was because of the social status of the von Westphalens—aristocratic and Protestant rather than bourgeois and converted Jews—or, perhaps, simply because they were not his own family. The baron, an official in the Prussian government, was, like Marx's father, a man of the Enlightenment—a "liberal conservative," Wheen calls him. Indeed, the two men knew and enjoyed each other's company, the children in both families became intimate, and the baron took a special liking to Karl.

Yet when Jenny and Karl became engaged in 1836 (she was twenty-two, he was eighteen), they kept the news from her family for almost a year, presumably because it would not have been entirely agreeable to them, if not for social reasons then for good practical ones: he was young, with no resources and no clear path to a career. They were married seven years later, at a small ceremony attended by her mother and brother (her father had died the previous year) and by no one from his family. After the marriage, Marx remained friendly with Jenny's ne'er-do-well brother, but he had nothing to do with his own family except to seek money from them.

It was a surprisingly congenial marriage. Jenny proved herself able to endure a kind of poverty she could never have imagined, and she turned out to be as irresponsible as he was in spending money when it did become available. It is remarkable that the marriage survived the hardships and the disorders that plagued them: the moves from one city to another as they were expelled from one or another—Paris, Brussels, Paris again, Cologne, and yet again Paris, all in half a dozen years—and later, when they were settled in London, from one lodging to another (this time for financial reasons); the ailments that plagued both of them and the premature deaths of three of their children; the humiliating expeditions abroad to wheedle money from relatives; the lifelong reliance upon Engels for their sustenance and upon their maid "Lenchen" (Helene Demuth) for bringing whatever semblance of order there was in the household.

Lenchen, it now appears, was something more than a family retainer. In

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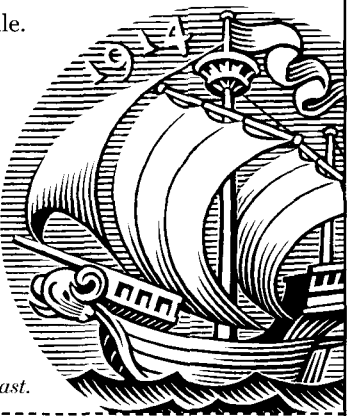

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1851, both she and her mistress were pregnant. Jenny gave birth first, to a girl ("my wife, alas," Marx informed Engels, "has been delivered of a girl, and not a *garçon*"), and Lenchen two months later to a boy, who was immediately sent off to foster parents. Since Lenchen was unmarried and had no visible suitor, rumors naturally circulated about the father—rumors, Marx complained, that would be painful to his wife, presumably because they named him as the father. Those rumors may well have reached Jenny, or she might have had her own suspicions, for a cryptic note in an autobiographical sketch written by her years later spoke of an "event" that summer that contributed to their worries, "both personal and others." Although she obviously never forgot that event, Lenchen remained in the household as if nothing had happened.

Marx's daughters were later given to understand that the child had been fathered by Engels, a stratagem Engels conspired in to avoid embarrassment for Marx. But documents revealed a century later have convinced most scholars, and Wheen as well, that Marx was indeed the father, although he never showed the least interest in the child or was curious enough to find out what had happened to him. (Freddie Dumuth lived in East London, worked in a factory, was a good union man, and outlived Marx's other children. When he died in 1929, his paternity was unknown to himself or to the public.)

The family's fortunes improved in the 1860s, when Marx received a small inheritance upon the long-awaited death of his mother (he was quite candid about his impatience for her death), and another bequest from an admirer (to whom he later dedicated *Capital*). He even had some success speculating in the stock market! In 1870, Engels, having sold his partnership in his family's business, bestowed upon Marx an annuity of £350, a not inconsiderable sum which permitted Marx to live the proper bourgeois life he had always thought due him.

But long before that, when he was in dire need, he lived in neighborhoods that were well beyond his means. In the mid-1860s he moved to a large house near Hampstead, explaining to Engels, in yet another letter asking for money, that he could hardly bring up his girls in a "purely proletarian household." So far from being proletarian, the girls attended a ladies' seminary, were given private language lessons, music lessons, and drawing lessons, and went to balls attired (thanks to Engels) in proper gowns. Marx had visiting cards printed for his wife in the name of "Mme. Jenny Marx, *née* Baronesse de Westphalen"—to impress tradesmen and Tories, Wheen suggests. The reference to Tories alludes to an occasion in 1871 when a journal ventured to write an unflattering account of him, and Marx had his wife write a letter demanding an apology and enclosing that card, which, he said, "will be bound to put fear into those Tories."

Karl Marx and his daughter at the end of the 1850s

It was a proper bourgeois (and Victorian) paterfamilias who forbade his daughters from seeing young men whom he regarded as unsuitable, and who queried their suitors about their intentions and financial prospects. No biographer can resist quoting the extraordinary letter that Marx wrote to Paul Lafargue, a radical medical student in Paris (he had met Marx when he came to London as a delegate to the General Council of the International), who was courting his daughter Laura.

> If you wish to continue your relations with my daughter, you will have to give up your present manner of "courting." You know full well that no engagement has been entered into, that as yet everything is undecided. And even if she were formally betrothed to you, you should not forget that this is a matter of long duration.... To my mind, true love expresses itself in reticence, modesty and even the shyness of the lover towards his object of veneration, and certainly not in giving free rein to one's passion and in premature demonstrations of familiarity. If you should urge your Creole temperament in your defence, it is my duty to interpose my sound reason between your temperament and my daughter. If in her presence you are incapable of loving her in a manner in keeping with the London latitude, you will have to resign yourself to loving her from a distance.

It does not take a psychoanalyst to see what Marx himself recognized, that he was recalling his own courtship of Jenny when he was younger, poorer, with no career outside the revolutionary movement. "I do not regret it," he assured Lafargue, speaking of his devotion to the revolutionary struggle. "Quite the contrary, if I had to live my life over again, I would do the same. I would not marry, however. As far as it lies within my power, I wish to save my daughter from the reefs on which her mother's life was wrecked." (His concerns about his daughters were well founded; they all had unhappy lives, one dying shortly before him and the two who survived him committing suicide.)

II.

The letter to Lafargue reveals another aspect of Marx that has been a perennial embarrassment to Marxists: his racism. Wheen points out that it was not Lafargue who was invoking his "Creole temperament" to account for his ardor; it was Marx, for whom "Creole" (Lafargue was of Franco-Spanish-Indian

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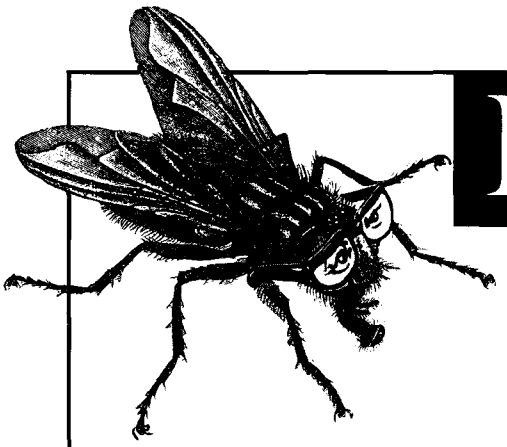

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ancestry) was a euphemism for "Negro"—or "nigger," as Marx more often said. To Engels, many years later, Marx described Lafargue as having "the blemish customarily found in the Negro tribe—*no sense of shame*." Marx's ultimate invective was "Jewish nigger"—this applied to Ferdinand Lassalle, a German Jewish socialist who did not share Marx's views but whom Marx did not publicly disown because he was useful to him in many ways. It was while Lassalle was a guest in his home that Marx wrote to Engels:

> It is now quite plain to me—as the shape of his head and the way his hair grows also testify—that he is descended from the Negroes who accompanied Moses' flight from Egypt, unless his mother or paternal grandmother interbred with a nigger. Now, this blend of Jewishness and Germanness, on the one hand, and basic negroid stock, on the other, must inevitably give rise to a peculiar product. The fellow's importunity is also nigger-like.

These were not the flippant comments of a callow youngster; they date from 1862, when Marx was well into the writing of *Capital*. And they would seem to be especially unseemly coming from Marx, whose swarthy complexion earned him the name, used by family and friends, "the Moor." ("Nigger" was common enough in mid-Victorian England, although even then it was a pejorative term. It has been pointed out that when John Stuart Mill replied to Carlyle's article "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question," he titled his answer, "The Negro Question.")

A year before the publication of *Capital*, Marx enthusiastically recommended to Engels a new book by Pierre Trémaux, called *Origine et transformations de l'homme et des autres êtres*. It was, Marx said, a "*very significant* advance over Darwin," for it gave a "basis in nature" (in geological and chemical changes in the soil) for differences of nationality and race, showing how, for example, the Slavs had been Tartarized and Mongolized, and why "the common Negro type is only a degeneration of a far higher one." Engels bought the book and was unpersuaded by it. He "didn't trouble to hide his belief," Wheen says, "that the old boy had gone barmy," and Trémaux was "quietly removed from the Marxist pantheon soon afterwards, and Darwin rehabilitated."

But Darwin was not quite rehabilitated, for (as the scholar Diane Paul has demonstrated), Marx continued to defend Trémaux, and Engels, replying to another letter by Marx, was much more conciliatory, conceding the importance of soil upon "racial and, logically, species formation." Marx then went on to recommend the book to one of his few remaining German friends, Dr. Ludwig Kugelmann. Moreover, Engels's reservations had to do only with the emphasis upon the soil. He himself had no doubt of the "physical degeneration" of some races, as he put it in his own tract on evolution written much later.

WHEN MARX WAS not reviling Lassalle as a "Jewish nigger," he was deriding him as "the Yid," "Itzig," "the Jewboy": expressions that recur frequently in Marx's letters, and not only in reference to Lassalle. Sometimes the simple adjective "Jew" sufficed as an epithet, but more often it was "dirty Jew" or "shitty Jew." Ramsgate, he complained to Engels when he was vacationing there, is "full of Jews and fleas." The editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, which had reprinted some articles from the German press critical of Marx, was taunted by him (not in private letters but in a published book) for having changed his name from Levi to Levy—a ruse that could hardly deceive anyone, Marx said, since "Mother Nature had inscribed his origins in the clearest possible way right in the middle of his face." That nose, Marx went on, "provides conversation throughout the year in the City of London . . . [and] serves the *Daily Telegraph* as elephant's trunk, antenna, lighthouse and telegraph." (The name of Marx's own grandfather, one recalls, was Halevi, or Halevy, as it is sometimes transcribed; the name Marx was a recent acquisition resulting from a Napoleonic decree.)

It can be plausibly argued (as Wheen does) that Marx's essay "On the Jewish Question," published in 1844, is not the anti-Semitic tract that it is sometimes made out to be. The essay includes the famous catechism: "What is the secular basis of Judaism? Practical need, self-interest. What is the secular cult of the Jew? Haggling. What is his secular God? Money." In this context, "Judaism" may be said to be a synonym for capitalism. And the statement, "The emancipation of the Jews is, in the last analysis, the emancipation of mankind from Judaism," may be taken as a prescription not for the civil emancipation of Jews but for the "human emancipation" from the money-dominated culture represented by Judaism—that is, capitalism. As one reads on in the essay, however, with its repeated references to the Jew as the deifier of money, and money as responsible for the degradation and the dehumanization of all of mankind, one is surely not far from an all too familiar kind of anti-Semitism, one shared by other socialists and socialist movements long before the virulent outbreak of anti-Semitism under Stalin.

Today, when we are so sensitive to stereotypes of all kinds, when the very idea of a stereotype is reprehensible, it is odd to find so many serious liberal commentators on Marx (Shlomo Avineri and David McClellan among them) tolerant of this stereotype of the "secular Jew," content to explain it as a symbol of the capitalist. In Marx's later writings, it is clearly more than a symbol: he was talking of real live Jews. In the *New York Tribune* in 1856 (in an article not quoted by Wheen), Marx launched a bitter attack on the "loan-mongering Jews"—he specified the Rothschilds, Stieglitzes, Foulds, Mendelssohns, and half a dozen others—who exploited their family connections throughout Europe to finance the Russian war in the Crimea. He even took the occasion to reinforce this stereotype with another, that of the Jesuit: "Thus we find every tyrant backed by a Jew, as is every Pope by a Jesuit. In truth, the cravings of oppressors would be hopeless, and the practicability of war out of the question, if there were not an army of Jesuits to smother thought and a handful of Jews to ransack pockets."

Perhaps the best defense of Marx against the charges of racism and anti-Semitism is the argument that he was equally nasty about almost all other groups (Catholics, in the above quotation, but also Russians and Poles), as well as ideological opponents. His quarrels with former friends and associates were notoriously vituperative and obsessively prolonged: the 300-page *Holy Family* savaging the Bauer brothers, the 100-page *The Poverty of Philosophy* deriding Proudhon's *The Philosophy of Poverty*, the 300-hundred page *Herr Vogt* (containing, among other things, a graphic description of Levy's nose), and all the other polemics that were almost as much invective (often scatalogical) as argument.

Wheen's account of Marx's activities in Communist organizations presents us with the familiar Marx, domineering, intemperate, intolerant. "He always spoke," wrote a visiting Russian at a meeting in Brussels in 1846, "in imperative words that would brook no contradiction and were made all the sharper by the almost painful impression of the tone which ran through everything he said. . . . Before me stood the embodiment of a democratic dictator." Marx's most notable contribution to the short-lived Communist League—indeed, the most notable achievement of the League—was the writing of the *Communist Manifesto*.

Later he took a prominent part in the International Working Men's Association (now known as the First International) founded by the London Trades Council in

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1864; it was not, in fact, a Communist organization, consisting of trade unionists, socialists of various stripes, republicans, and others, with little in common but their working-class identity (except, of course, for such "head" workers as Marx and Engels). As he had done earlier with the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx rewrote the original statement of principles under the pretext of editing it, so that it was more in accord with his own views (although without the revolutionary flourishes of the *Manifesto*). When the International started to disintegrate after the failure of the Paris Commune, Marx, tired of the factional disputes and wanting to withdraw from active participation but not wanting to cede leadership to anyone else, arranged that the council be transferred to New York, in effect sentencing it to death; the International was formally dissolved four years later. This was Marx's last appearance in any political or organizational, still less revolutionary, role.

III.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION, Wheen announces his intention to "strip away the mythology" that has enveloped Marx the man. In dealing (very briefly) with Marx the thinker, however, he has created another mythology, according to which all modern biographers and commentators are ideologues of the Cold War, the West demonizing him and Communist countries deifying him.

The deifiers are quickly disposed of: the Soviet Union gave Marx "the status of a secular God, with Lenin as John the Baptist and, of course, Comrade Stalin himself as the redeeming Messiah." The Western demonizers get more extended treatment. For them, Marx was "the demonic begetter of all evil, the founder of an awesomely sinister cult, the man whose baleful influence must be suppressed." As evidence of this demonization, Wheen cites a biography in 1947 which enjoyed some small success at the time but is of little account today, and he refers, at some length, to a religious screed published in 1976, which belongs to the literature of religious fanaticism, not Marxist studies. "The end of the Cold War and the apparent triumph of God over Satan," Wheen tells us, brought no respite from this demonization, with Francis Fukuyama "smugly" announcing the end of history, and the *Communist Manifesto*, "the most influential political pamphlet of all time," now no more than a "quaint historical relic."

This account of the demonizing of Marx will come as a surprise to those who have read the reputable (and sympathetic) biography by David McLellan, or have watched the emergence in the West, precisely during the Cold War, of a newly deified Marx, a "young Marx," a "Marx with a human face" (this on the basis of Marx's early writings, which began to be published in German in the 1930s and became generally known after World War II). It will also surprise those who saw that "quaint historical relic," the *Communist Manifesto*, reissued only two years ago, on the occasion of its 150th anniversary, in half a dozen editions by reputable publishers with introductions by eminent historians and commentators. (Wheen himself observes that in visiting a London bookshop he found no fewer than nine English editions.)

So far from demonizing Marx, these new editions eulogize him. One of them, introduced by the historian (and self-described Communist) Eric Hobsbawm, merited not merely a review but a laudatory article by Steven Marcus in *The New York Times* under the title "Marx's Masterpiece at 150." There the *Manifesto* appears as part of "an integral modern sensibility," recalling a Gothic tale or Arabian Nights fantasy, with echoes from the Bible, Goethe, Byron, Mary Shelley, and the like. Other commentators have been less fanciful but no less respectful, crediting Marx (as Marcus also does) with anticipating the most important development of modern times, the globalization of industry and culture.

This is also Wheen's claim, although he makes it appear that he alone has been astute enough to see it. "Today's pundits and politicians who fancy themselves as modern thinkers like to mention the buzz-word 'globalization' at every opportunity—without realising that Marx was already on the case in 1848." Wheen jeers at those "academics and politicians [who] were trotted out to gloat over the old boy's imbecility"; one of these, "a British intellectual, Lord Skidelsky" (the distinguished economist and author of a magisterial biography of Keynes) "sneered that Marx had 'got it wrong' by predicting imminent revolution." In fact, Wheen says, revolution did break out within days of the *Communist Manifesto*'s publication. To be sure, he goes on, those revolutions were quickly suppressed "and bourgeois triumphalism began its long reign"; what Marx took to be the "death throes" of capitalism proved to be its "birth pangs." Lest this appear as an admission

Short-Term Memory

A few things came to observe me:
a terrible explosion,
flowers, dustiness in the boroughs,
planners plagued by increasingly goofy proposals.

I could have pretended not to be in.
Instead I came to the door in shirtsleeves,
extending a hand to the vexed guests. "What about those Orioles,
this terribly warm weather we've been having?" Truthfully,
I was suffering from the heat and didn't know it.
It was enough just then to perceive life as a sandbar,
or a mirage of one, that the tide is frantically
trying to erase so as to cover its tracks.

Broken discoveries invaded my short-term memory,
but not so you'd notice. Continuing the polite
palaver I asked after the health of this one and that one,
how little Lois was doing in school, what Howie was up to
in his treehouse. It was as though no one cared.
Or had seen me. They shuffled aimlessly away
to come alive later no doubt in some sex sequence,
while here leaves are browning before the end of summer
and the groundskeeper waits.

What about your immortal soul?
I may have lost it, just this once, but other chapters
will arrive, bright as a child's watercolor,
and you'd want to be around me.

John Ashbery

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that Marx had "got it wrong," Wheen changes the subject: if Marx's optimism about revolution was "misplaced," "his vision of the global market was uncannily prescient."

ONE WOULD NEVER know, from Wheen's three-page account of the *Communist Manifesto*, that Marx's prediction about the "world market" was integrally related to his prediction about revolution, for that would be achieved when capitalism was at its highest point of development, at which time the "contradictions" of capitalism would inevitably lead to revolution. One of these contradictions, and the most dramatic part of the *Manifesto*, involved the proletariat. For as industry progressed, Marx insisted, so the proletariat would regress: "The modern laborer, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth." It is a memorable portrait of the proletariat that emerges here: a class enslaved by the bourgeois system of labor, made into a "commodity" and "appendage of the machine," stripped of "every trace of national character" and of such other "bourgeois prejudices" as law, morality, and religion, their families "torn asunder and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labor," and their wives nothing more than "prostitutes."

This is the famous "pauperization" or "immiseration" thesis that has haunted readers of the *Communist Manifesto* and troubled commentators for a century and more—but not Wheen, who does not mention it in his account of the document. Yet it is at the heart of the *Manifesto*, for it is this that makes revolution inevitable—not a product of will and consciousness, or agitation and organization, but of historical necessity. The proletariat is the instrument of revolution precisely because it is in this desperate condition. The people will rise because they have "nothing to lose but their chains." This is what makes the Communist revolution, and communism itself, not a utopian ideal but, as Marx put it in *The German Ideology*, the "real movement" of history.

The proletariat does finally make its appearance in Wheen's chapter on *Capital* (the shortest chapter in the book), in the famous passage echoing the *Communist Manifesto*, in which "the worker" is distorted into a "fragment of a man," degraded to the level of an "appendage of a machine," "alienated" from the labor process, subjected to a "despotism the more hateful for its meanness," his wife and children dragged "beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital." The passage concludes: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalisation and moral degradation at the opposite pole."

Wheen criticizes the economist Paul Samuelson for perpetuating a "myth" based on a "misreading" of this section of *Capital*, when he said that the impoverishment of the workers "simply never took place." Marx, Wheen protests, was referring not to the proletariat, but only to the "'lowest sediment' of society—the unemployed, the ragged, the sick, the old, the widows and orphans." "Can anyone deny," he asks, "that such an underclass still exists?" "Only a halfwit—or an economics lecturer" could interpret this as a prediction of the "absolute financial impoverishment" of workers. What Marx did predict was a "*relative*—not an absolute—decline in wages," and this is "self-evidently true."

At the risk of being such a halfwit, I must confess that I do read this text as a prediction of the absolute financial (and spiritual) impoverishment of workers. It was surely not a decline of wages, relative or absolute, that Marx had in mind when he described the "accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalisation, and moral degradation" of the proletariat. Nor was he speaking only of the "lowest sediment" or "underclass" of society—the unemployed and the old, widows and orphans. It was the "worker," Marx specified (the "laborer," in other translations), who, by the very nature of his class position, his relation to the means of production, is distorted, degraded, deformed, alienated.

WHEEN MOCKS THOSE who make so much of the failure of Marx's predictions. But they are not predictions on the order, say, of the outcome of an election or a World Series (plus or minus three percentage points). Marx's predictions—about the pauperization and dehumanization of the proletariat, the internal contradictions and mounting crises of capitalism, the class struggle and inevitable revolution—are at the very heart of his doctrine. It does not mitigate the failure of these predictions to cite his prescience about the globalization of the capitalist economy, when it was the catastrophic breakdown of that economy (in part because it was global) that Marx himself emphasized. Nor does it deny the failure of the pauperization thesis to assert that wages have declined, not absolutely, to be sure, but relatively.

But such doctrinal issues are almost irrelevant to Wheen, for *Capital*, he goes on to explain, is neither the "scientific hypothesis" nor "economic treatise" that zealots think it, but "a work of the imagination: a Victorian melodrama, or a vast Gothic novel ... or perhaps a satirical utopia like Swift's land of the Houyhnhnms...." This accounts for the "absurdities" in *Capital*, which are "surreal," "ironic," signaling us that we are in "a world of spectres and apparitions," "embarked on a picaresque odyssey through the realms of higher nonsense." *Capital*, in short, is a "shaggy-dog story" (hence the title of the chapter), like *Tristram Shandy*, "full of systems and syllogisms, paradoxes and metaphysics, theories and hypotheses, abstruse explanations and whimsical tomfoolery."

"With friends like this...," we are tempted to observe, after reading this frivolous account of the magnum opus that Marx labored over for decades. Although Marxism may be dead as a political force, it is very much alive for those wanting to understand not only the ideology itself, but also its attraction for so many people for so long. Some old questions continue to fascinate us even as we are confronted with new ones. What is the relationship between Hegel and Marx? (Marx, at least, did not find Hegel as "impenetrably obscure" as Wheen does.) Or between the "early" Marx and the "late" Marx? (It was not Marx, as Wheen says, but Engels who, after Marx's death, said that they had abandoned *The German Ideology* to the "gnawing of the mice"—not the "gnawing criticism of the mice.") Or between Marx "the man" and Marxism? Or between Marxism as philosophy and Marxism as praxis? Wheen assures us that "the history of the twentieth century is Marx's legacy"—and then disclaims Stalin, Mao, Che, and Castro as his legitimate heirs. In what sense, then, is the century his legacy?

WHAT IS REALLY remarkable, and what would take all the wit and wisdom of a biographer or a historian to fathom, is the fact that a theory so rigorously materialistic and deterministic survived for so long, even as it was being patently belied, not only by history but by the recalcitrance of human nature. One is reminded of the adage that no good theory can be falsified by mere facts. The class struggle did not develop as it was meant to develop; classes did not behave as they were supposed to behave; and individuals (including, or especially, revolutionaries) did not conform to the class roles to which they were assigned, or exhibit the "consciousness" appropriate to their class. The very word "proletariat" is now archaic. And the term "false consciousness" has had to

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be coined to account for the persistent refusal of individuals to think (and to act) in accord with their supposedly "real" interests and historical roles. Yet it was precisely the materialistic and deterministic aspect of the doctrine, which could most readily be disproved, that was also its strongest appeal, for it was this that made it seem "scientific," and therefore assured of success.

This is the final irony: Marxism as messianism. If all of previous history is the history of class struggle, then communism, ushering in a classless society, is surely the end of history. And this is the truly revolutionary nature of Marxism: the promise of secular redemption, of the de-alienation of man. For this purpose nothing less than a powerful determinism will avail. Earlier messianic movements could invoke the supreme authority of God, of divine providence. In a secular age, devoid of any higher authority, only a materialistic determinism—"historical materialism," as Engels put it—could serve to validate a doctrine as radical, as presumptuous, as this. Communism, the classless society, makes its appearance only at the end of history, but the "real movement" toward it is in the present. And it is this real movement toward this idyllic end that is thought to justify the harsh realities of the present—the brutalities of revolution and the tyrannies of communist regimes.

This is the sense in which one may say, with Wheen, that the twentieth century was Marx's "legacy." But to say this one must take Marx seriously, as Wheen does not. Only then can we begin to understand that legacy—to understand not only the twentieth century but perhaps also the twenty-first, which is already giving signs of looking to science and technology, to genetics and electronics, for a new kind of materialistic determinism that promises not only to reform society but also to reform, to re-create, man. ■

The smallness of the "big" novel.

Human, All Too Inhuman

By James Wood

White Teeth by Zadie Smith

(Random House, 462 pp., $25.95)

I.

A genre is hardening. It is becoming easy to describe the contemporary idea of the "big, ambitious novel." Familial resemblances are asserting themselves, and a parent can be named: he is Dickens. Such recent novels as *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Underworld*, *Infinite Jest*, and now *White Teeth* overlap rather as the pages of an atlas expire into each other at their edges. A landscape is disclosed—lively and varied and brightly marked, but riven by dead gullies.

The big contemporary novel is a perpetual-motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity. It seems to want to abolish stillness, as if ashamed of silence—as it were, a criminal running endless charity marathons. Stories and sub-stories sprout on every page, as these novels continually flourish their glamorous congestion. Inseparable from this culture of permanent storytelling is the pursuit of vitality at all costs. Indeed, vitality *is* storytelling, as far as these books are concerned. If, say, a character is introduced in London, call him Toby Awknotuby (that is, "To be or not to be"—ha!) then we will be swiftly told that he has a twin in Delhi (called Boyt, which is an anagram of Toby, of course), who, like Toby, has the same very curious genital deformation, and that their mother belongs to a religious cult based, oddly enough, in the Orkney Islands, and that their father (who was born at the exact second that the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima) has been a Hell's Angel for the last thirteen years (but a very curious Hell's Angels group it is, devoted only to the fanatical study of late Wordsworth), and that Toby's mad left-wing aunt was curiously struck dumb when Mrs. Thatcher was elected prime minister in 1979 and has not spoken a word since. And all this, over many pages, before poor Toby Awknotuby has done a thing, or thought a thought!

Is this a caricature, really? Recent novels—veritable relics of St. Vitus—by Rushdie, Pynchon, DeLillo, Foster Wallace, and others, have featured a great rock musician who, when born, began immediately to play air guitar in his crib (Rushdie); a talking dog, a mechanical duck, a giant octagonal cheese, and two clocks having a conversation (Pynchon); a nun called Sister Edgar who is obsessed with germs and who may be a reincarnation of J. Edgar Hoover, and a conceptual artist painting retired B-52 bombers in the New Mexico desert (DeLillo); a terrorist group devoted to the liberation of Quebec called the Wheelchair Assassins, and a film so compelling that anyone who sees it dies (Foster Wallace). Zadie Smith's novel features, among other things: a terrorist Islamic group based in North London with a silly acronym (KEVIN), an animal-rights group called FATE, a Jewish scientist who is genetically engineering a mouse, a woman born during an earthquake in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1907; a group of Jehovah's Witnesses who think that the world is ending on December 31, 1992; and twins, one in Bangladesh and one in London, who both break their noses at about the same time.

This is not magical realism. It is hysterical realism. Storytelling has become a kind of grammar in these novels; it is how they structure and drive themselves on. The conventions of realism are not being abolished but, on the contrary, exhausted, and overworked. Appropriately, then, objections are not made at the level of verisimilitude, but at the level of morality: this style of writing is not to be faulted because it lacks reality—the usual charge against botched realism—but because it seems evasive of reality while borrowing from realism itself. It is not a cock-up, but a cover-up.

One is reminded of Kierkegaard's remark that travel is the way to avoid despair. For all these books share a bonhomous, punning, lively serenity of spirit. Their mode of narration seems to be almost incompatible with tragedy or anguish. Indeed, *Underworld*, the darkest of these books, carries within itself, in its calm profusion of characters and plots, its flawless carpet of fine prose on page after page, a soothing sense that it might never have to end, that another thousand or two thousand pages might easily be added. There are many enemies, seen and unseen, in *Underworld*, but silence is not one of them.

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The optimism of all this "vitality" is shared by many readers, apparently. Again and again, one sees books such as these praised for being cabinets of wonders. Bright lights are taken as evidence of habitation. The mere existence of a giant cheese or a cloned mouse or several different earthquakes in a novel is seen as meaningful or wonderful, evidence of great imaginative powers. And this is because too often these features are mistaken for scenes, as if they constituted the movement or the toil or the pressure of the novel, rather than taken for what they are—props of the imagination, meaning's toys. The existence of vitality is mistaken for the drama of vitality.

WHAT ARE THESE stories evading? One of the awkwardnesses evaded is precisely an awkwardness about the possibility of novelistic storytelling. This in turn has to do with an awkwardness about character and the representation of character. Stories, after all, are generated by human beings, and it might be said that these recent novels are full of *in* human stories, whereby that phrase is precisely an oxymoron, an impossibility, a wanting it both ways. By and large, these are not stories that could never happen (as, say, a thriller is often something that could never happen); rather, they clothe real people who could never actually endure the stories that happen to them. They are not stories in which people defy the laws of physics (obviously, one could be born in an earthquake); they are stories which defy the laws of persuasion. This is what Aristotle means when he says that in storytelling "a convincing impossibility" (say, a man levitating) is always preferable to "an unconvincing possibility" (say, the possibility that a fundamentalist group in London would continue to call itself KEVIN). And what above all makes these stories unconvincing is precisely their very profusion, their relatedness. One cult is convincing; three cults are not.

Novels, after all, turn out to be delicate structures, in which one story judges the viability, the actuality, of another. Yet it is the relatedness of these stories that their writers seem most to cherish, and to propose as an absolute value. An endless web is all they need for meaning. Each of these novels is excessively centripetal. The different stories all intertwine, and double and triple on themselves. Characters are forever seeing connections and links and plots, and paranoid parallels. (There is something essentially paranoid about the belief that everything is connected to everything else.)

These novelists proceed like street-planners of old in South London: they can never name a street Ruskin Street without linking a whole block, and filling it with Carlyle Street, and Turner Street, and Morris Street, and so on. Near the end of *White Teeth*, one of the characters, Irie Jones, has sex with one of the twins, called Millat; but then rushes round to see the other twin, called Magid, to have sex with him only moments after. She becomes pregnant; and she will never know which twin impregnated her. But it is really Smith's hot plot which has had its way with her. In *Underworld*, everything and everyone is connected in some way to paranoia and to the nuclear threat. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* suggests that a deep structure of myth, both Greek and Indian, binds all the characters together. And *White Teeth* ends with a clashing finale, in which all the novel's characters—most of whom are now dispersed between various cults and fanatical religious groups—head toward the press conference which the scientist, Marcus Chalfen, is delivering in London, to announce the successful cloning of his mouse.

Alas, since the characters in these novels are not really alive, not fully human, their connectedness can only be insisted on. Indeed, the reader begins to think that it is being insisted on precisely because they do not really exist. Life is never experienced with such a fervid intensity of connectedness. After all, hell *is* other people, actually: real humans disaggregate more often than they congregate. So these novels find themselves in the paradoxical position of enforcing connections that are finally conceptual rather than human. The forms of these novels *tell* us that we are all connected—by the Bomb (DeLillo), or by myth (Rushdie), or by our natural multiracial multiplicity (Smith); but it is a formal lesson rather an actual enactment.

AN EXCESS OF storytelling has become the contemporary way of shrouding, in majesty, a lack; it is the Sun King principle. That lack is the human. All these contemporary deformations flow from a crisis that is not only the fault of the writers concerned, but is now of some lineage: the crisis of character, and how to represent it in fiction. Since modernism, many of the finest writers have been offering critique and parody of the idea of character, in the absence of convincing ways to return to an innocent mimesis. Certainly, the characters who inhabit the big, ambitious contemporary novels have a showy liveliness, a theatricality, that almost succeeds in hiding the fact that they are without life: liveliness hangs off them like jewelry.

This is less true of Zadie Smith than of Rushdie; her principal characters move in and out of human depth. Sometimes they seem to provoke her sympathy, at other times they are only externally comic. But watch what she does with one of the many bit-parts in this large and inventive book. Smith is describing the founder of KEVIN, the fundamentalist Islamic group based in North London. She tells us that he was born Monty Clyde Benjamin in Barbados in 1960, "the son of two poverty-stricken barefoot Presbyterian dypsomaniacs," and converted to Islam at the age of fourteen. At eighteen, he fled Barbados for Riyadh, where he studied the Koran at Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University. He was five years there, but he became disillusioned with the teaching, and returned to England in 1984. In Birmingham, he

> locked himself in his aunt's garage and spent five more years in there, with only the Qur'an and the fascicles of Endless Bliss for company. He took his food in through the cat-flap, deposited his shit and piss in a Coronation biscuit tin and passed it back out the same way, and did a thorough routine of press-ups and sit-ups to prevent muscular atrophy. The *Selly Oak Reporter* wrote regular bylines on him during this period, nicknaming him 'The Guru in the Garage' (in view of the large Birmingham Muslim population, this was thought preferable to the press-desk favoured suggestion, 'The Loony in the Lock-Up') and had their fun interviewing his bemused aunt, one Carlene Benjamin, a devoted member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Clearly, Smith does not lack for powers of invention. The problem is that there is too much of it. The passage might stand, microcosmically, for the novel's larger dilemma of storytelling: on its own, almost any of these details (except perhaps the detail about passing the shit and piss through the cat-flap) might be persuasive. Together, they vandalize each other: the Presbyterian dypsomaniacs and the Mormon aunt make impossible the reality of the fanatical Muslim. As realism, it is incredible; as satire, it is cartoonish; as cartoon, it is too realistic; and anyway, we are not led toward the consciousness of a truly devoted religionist. It is all shiny externality, all caricature.

II.

IT MIGHT BE argued that literature has only very rarely represented character. Even the greatest novelists, such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, resort to stock caricature, didactic speaking over characters, repetitive leitmotifs, and so on. The truly unhostaged writer, such as Chekhov, is rare. *Buddenbrooks*, a beauti-

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ful novel written by a writer only a year older than Zadie Smith, makes plentiful use of the leitmotif, as a way of affixing signatures to different characters. (Yet how those tagged characters live!) Less great but very distinguished writers indulge in the kind of unreal, symbolic vitality now found in the contemporary novel—consider the autodidact in Sartre's *Nausea*, who is somewhat unbelievably working his way alphabetically through an entire library, or Grand, the writer in *The Plague*, who somewhat unbelievably writes the first line of his novel over and over again.

Dickens, of course, is the great master of the leitmotif. Many of Dickens's characters are, as Forster rightly put it, flat but vibrating very fast. They are vivid blots of essence. They are souls seen only through thick, gnarled casings. Their vitality is a histrionic one. Dickens has been the overwelming influence on postwar fiction, especially postwar British fiction. There is hardly a writer who has not been touched by him: Angus Wilson and Muriel Spark, Martin Amis's robust gargoyles, Rushdie's outsize chararacters, the intensely theatrical Angela Carter, the Naipaul of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, V. S. Pritchett's cocky salesmen, and now Zadie Smith. In America, Bellow's genius for grotesquerie and for vivid external description owes something to Dickens. And what is *Underworld* but an old-fashioned Dickensian novel like *Bleak House*, with an ambition to describe all of society on its different levels?

One obvious reason for the popularity of Dickens among contemporary novelists is that his way of creating and propelling theatrically alive characters offers an easy model for writers unable, or unwilling, to create characters who are fully human. Dickens's world seems to be populated by vital simplicities. He shows a novelist how to get a character launched, if not how to keep him afloat, and this glittering liveliness is simply easier to copy, easier to figure out, than the recessed and deferred complexities of, say, Henry James's character-making. Put bluntly, Dickens makes caricature respectable for an age in which, for various reasons, it has become hard to create character. Dickens licenses the cartoonish, coats it in the surreal, or even the Kafkaesque (the Circumlocution Office). Indeed, to be fair to contemporary novelists, Dickens shows that a large part of characterization *is* merely the management of caricature.

Yet that is not all there is in Dickens, which is why most contemporary novelists are only his morganatic heirs. There is in Dickens also an immediate access to strong feeling, which rips the puppetry of his people, breaks their casings, and lets us enter them. Mr. Micawber may be a caricature, a simple, univocal essence, but he feels, and he makes us feel. One recalls that very passionate and simple sentence, in which David Copperfield tells us: "Mr. Micawber was waiting for me within the gate, and we went up to his room, and cried very much." It is difficult to find a single moment like that in all the many thousands of pages of the big, ambitious, contemporary books—difficult to imagine the possibility of such a sentence ever occurring amid the coils of knowingness and the latest information.

It is now customary to read 700-page novels, to spend hours and hours within a fictional world, without experiencing anything really affecting, sublime, or beautiful. Which is why one never wants to re-read a book such as *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, while *Madame Bovary* is faded by our repressings. This is partly because some of the more impressive novelistic minds of our age do not think that language and the representation of consciousness are the novelist's quarries any more. Information has become the new character. It is this, and the use made of Dickens, that connects DeLillo and the reportorial Tom Wolfe, despite the literary distinction of the former and the cinematic vulgarity of the latter.

So it suffices to make do with vivacious caricatures, whose deeper justification arises—if it ever arises—from their immersion in a web of connections. Zadie Smith has said, in an interview, that her concern is with "ideas and themes that I can tie together—problem-solving from other places and worlds." It is not the writer's job, she says, "to tell us how somebody felt about something, it's to tell us how the world works." Citing David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers, she comments: "these are guys who know a great deal about the world. They understand macro-microeconomics, the way the Internet works, math, philosophy, but . . . they're still people who know something about the street, about family, love, sex, whatever. That is an incredibly fruitful combination. If you can get the balance right. And I don't think any of us have quite yet, but hopefully one of us will."

III.

That is gently, modestly put. And to give Smith her considerable due, she may be more likely to "get the balance right" than any of her contemporaries—in part just because she sees that a balance is needed, and in part because she is very talented and still very young. At her best, she approaches her characters and makes them human; she is much more interested in this, and more naturally gifted at it, than is Rushdie. For a start, her minor Dickensian caricatures and grotesques, the petty filaments of this big book, often glow. Here, for instance, is a school headmaster, a small character who flares and dies within a few pages—but Smith captures his physical essence surely: "The headmaster of Glenard Oak was in a continual state of implosion. His hairline had gone out and stayed out like a determined tide, his eye sockets were deep, his lips had been sucked backwards into his mouth, he had no body to speak of, or rather he folded what he had into a small, twisted package, sealing it with a pair of crossed arms and crossed legs." This conjures a recognizable type, and indeed a recognizable English type, always in the process of withdrawing or disappearing—as Smith's highly Dickensian image suggests, always mailing himself out of the room.

Smith, as Rushdie has said, is "astonishingly assured". About her, one is tempted to apply Orwell's remark that Dickens had rotten architecture but great gargoyles. The architecture is the essential silliness of her lunge for multiplicities—her cults and cloned mice and Jamaican earthquakes. Formally, her book lacks moral seriousness. But her details are often instantly convincing, both funny and moving. They justify themselves. She tells the story, essentially, of two families, the Joneses and the Iqbals. Archie Jones is married to a Jamaican woman, Clara Bowden, and is the father of Irie. He fought in the Second World War, as a teenager, alongside Samad Iqbal, a Bengali Muslim from Bangladesh. The two men have been friends for thirty years, and now live near each other in North London. This is a bustling, desolate area, full of velvet-lined Indian restaurants and yeasty pubs and unclean laundromats. Smith bouncily captures its atmosphere. Any street in this region will include, "without exception":

> one defunct sandwich bar still advertising breakfast
> one locksmith uninterested in marketing frills (KEYS CUT HERE)
> and one permanently shut unisex hair salon, the proud bearer of some unspeakable pun (*Upper Cuts* or *Fringe Benefits* or *Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow*).

Samad's wife Alsana is an engaging creation. She earns a living sewing leather garments, at home, that are bound "for a shop called Domination in Soho." Samad is a waiter at a restaurant in central London, an intelligent man, frustrated by his foolish occupation; and a moral man, frustrated by the lax country he lives in. He spends much of the novel in a fury—he is, precisely, a caricature more than a character—about England and English secular-

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ism. He is determined that his twin sons, Millat and Magid, will grow up in the ways of the Koran. But Millat, at least initially, has joined a tough street gang, who speak "a strange mix of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujurati and English," and hangs out on streets populated by "Becks, B-boys, Indie kids, wide-boys, ravers, rude-boys, Acidheads, Sharons, Tracies, Kevs, Nation Brothers, Raggas and Pakis." (Such an inventory is what Smith means by bringing us the information. But this crocodile of youths has a use-by date inside it: Colin MacInnes brought us the information about the London of the 1950s in *Absolute Beginners*, and where is that novel? At an absolute end.) Millat's brother, Magid, is a scientific rationalist, and apparently no more interested in Islam than his brother. But his father decides to send Magid, the better student, back to Bangladesh, for a safely religious education. The plan backfires, of course.

WHEN SMITH IS writing well, she seems capable of a great deal. At several moments, for example, she proves herself skilled at interior monologue, and brilliant, in other passages, at free indirect style:

> 'Oh Archie, you *are* funny,' said Maureen sadly, for she had always fancied Archie a *bit* but never more than a bit because of this strange way he had about him, always talking to Pakistanis and Caribbeans like he didn't even notice and now he'd gone and married one and hadn't even thought it worth mentioning what colour she was until the office dinner when she turned up black as anything and Maureen almost choked on her prawn cocktail.

One of the novel's best chapters is a gently satirical portrait of the Chalfen family, middle-class North London Jewish intellectuals of impeccable smugness, with whom Millat, Magid, and Irie become involved. (One of the Chalfen sons, Joshua, attends Glenard Oak school with the Jones and Iqbal children.) There is Marcus Chalfen, busy with his genetic experiments, and his wife, Joyce, who writes about gardening. She lives the politically unexamined life of the liberal who is sure that she is right about everything. Even her gardening books encode her *bien-pensées* about the importance of hybridity. Smith funnily invents a long passage from one of them: "In the garden, as in the social and political arena, change should be the only constant.... It is said cross-pollinating plants also tend to produce more and better-quality seeds."

Yet this same Joyce cannot help exclaiming, when Millat and Iris first appear in her house, about the delightful novelty of having "brown strangers" in the house. By mocking the Chalfens, even gently, Smith works against the form of her own novel, and guards against a Rushdie-like orthodoxy about the worship of hybridity. Here Smith evinces an important negative capability which she promptly deforms by inserting a needless little lecture into the same chapter: "This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment." Still, these are rare lapses. Far more powerful than such announcements on the authorial Tannoy is a lovely moment when Marcus Chalfen puts his arms around his adored wife (the two are devoted, if a little complacently, to each other), "like a gambler collecting his chips in circled arms," whereupon the fifteen-year-old Irie, whose parents are much less communicative, thinks "of her own parents, whose touches were now virtual, existing only in the absences where both sets of fingers had previously been: the remote control, the biscuit tin, the light switches."

Smith is a frustrating writer, for she has a natural comic gift, and yet is willing to let passages of her book descend into cartoonishness and a kind of itchy, restless extremism. Here, for instance, is her description of O' Connell's, a bar and café where Archie and Samad have been regulars for many years. Comically, it is run by a family of Iraqis, "the many members of which share a bad skin condition," but it has kept its Irish name, and various Irish accoutrements. It is where, we are told, Archie and Samad have talked about everything, including women:

> Hypothetical women. If a woman walked past the yolk-stained window of O'Connell's (a woman had never been known to venture inside) they would smile and speculate—depending on Samad's religious sensibilities that evening—on matters as far reaching as whether one would kick her out of bed in a hurry, to the relative merits of stockings or tights, and then on, inevitably, to the great debate: small breasts (that stand up) vs big breasts (that flop to the sides). But there was never any question of real women, real flesh and blood and wet and sticky women. Not until now. And so the unprecedented events of the past few months called for an earlier O'Connell's summit than usual. Samad had finally phoned Archie and confessed the whole terrible mess: he had cheated, he was cheating.... Archie had been silent for a bit, and then said, 'Bloody hell. Four o'clock it is, then. Bloody hell.' He was like that, Archie. Calm in a crisis.
>
> But come 4.15 and still no sign of him, a desperate Samad had chewed every fingernail he possessed to the cuticle and collapsed on the counter, nose squished up against the hot glass where the battered burgers were kept, eye to eye with a postcard showing the eight different local charms of County Antrim.
>
> Mickey, chef, waiter and proprietor, who prided himself on knowing each customer's name and knowing when each customer was out of sorts, prised Samad's face off the hot glass with an egg slice.

This kind of writing is closer to a low and unliterary "comic" style than it ought to be. It has a pertness, but it squanders itself in a mixture of banality and crudity. And unlike many passages in the book, it cannot shelter behind the excuse that it is being written from within the mind of a particular character. This is Smith as narrator, as writer. Yet nothing we know about Samad (and nothing we later learn, incidentally) convinces us that Smith is telling the truth when she tells us that this hot-headed Muslim sat talking about women's breasts; the topic seems, instead, to have been chosen by Smith from a catalogue of clichés called "Things Men Talk About in Bars." And then there is the extremism of the language: Samad is not just anxious, but has bitten his fingers down to the cuticles, and has to be "prised" off the counter "with an egg slice." It seems only a step from here to exploding condoms and the like. The language is oddly thick-fingered, and stubs itself into the vernacular: that juvenile verb "squished," for instance. It comports bewilderingly with sentences and passages elsewhere that are precise and sculpted.

THE FIRST HALF of Smith's novel is strikingly better-written than the second half, which seems hasty, the prose and wild plots bucking along in messy harnesses. Just as the quality of the writing undulates, sometimes from page to page, so Smith seems unable to decide exactly the depth of her commitment to the revelation of character. Samad offers a good example. Overall, he must be accounted a caricature, complete with Indian malapropisms and Indian (or Bengali) "temperament," for he has, really, only the one dimension, his angry defence of Islam. Still, every so often Smith's prose opens out into little holidays from caricature, apertures through which we see Samad tenderly, and see his frustrations, such as the restaurant he works in: "From six in the evening until three in the morning; and then every day was spent asleep, until daylight was as rare as a decent tip. For what's the point, Samad would think, pushing aside two mints and a receipt to find fifteen pence, what is the point of

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tipping a man the same amount you would throw in a fountain to chase a wish."

This is breathtaking, and peers into a depth of yearning: it is very fine to link the tip to money thrown into a well, and to link both to Samad's large desires. One wonders if Smith knows how good it is. For it is bewildering when, thirty pages later, she seems to leave Samad's interior, and watch him from the outside, satirically (and rather crudely). She is describing Samad's and Archie's war experiences, and the moment they first met. The tone wavers drastically around the mock-heroic. Archie has been staring at Samad, and Samad, all of nineteen, malapropistically demands: "My friend, what is it you find so darned mysterious about me that it has you in such constant revelries? . . . Is it that you are doing some research into wireless operators or are you just in a passion over my arse?" We seem to be in the world of cartoons again.

Forty pages later, Smith has a funny passage about Samad trying and failing to resist the temptation of masturbation. Samad becomes, for a while, an enthusiastic masturbator, on the arrangement (with Allah) that if he masturbates, he must fast, as recompense: "this in turn . . . led to the kind of masturbation that even a fifteen-year-old boy living in the Shetlands might find excessive. His only comfort was that he, like Roosevelt, had made a New Deal: he was going to beat but he wasn't going to eat." As in the passage about O' Connell's, the question is one of voice. Again, Smith is not writing from inside Samad's head here; the sophomoric comparison to a boy in the Shetlands is hers. So what is going on? The reference to the New Deal is hopelessly misplaced, and merely demonstrates the temptation that this kind of writing cannot resist, of binging in any kind of allusion. And what of that phrase, "he was going to beat but he wasn't going to eat"? "Beat" is not Samad's word; he would never use it. It is Smith's word, and in using it she not only speaks over her character, she reduces him, obliterates him.

And so it goes on, in a curious shuffle of sympathy and distance, affiliation and divorce, brilliance and cartoonishness, astonishing maturity and ordinary puerility. *White Teeth* is a big book, and does not deal in fractions: when it excites, and when it frustrates, it "o'erflows the measure." Indeed, its size tests itself, for one reason it disappoints has partly to do with the fact that it becomes clear that over the length of the book Smith's stories will develop, and develop wildly, but her characters will not develop at all. Yes, Smith's characters change; they change opinions, and change countries. Millat, once an urban rapper, becomes a fundamentalist terrorist; Joshua Chalfen, once a rationalist and loyal son of his scientist father, becomes an animal-rights freak. Yet whenever these people change their minds, there is always a kind of awkwardness in the text, a hiatus, and the change itself is always rapidly asserted, usually within a paragraph or two. It as if the novel were deciding at these moments whether to cast depths on its shallows, and deciding against.

Which way will the ambitious contemporary novel go? Will it dare a picture of life, or just shout a spectacle? *White Teeth* contains both kinds of writing. Near the end, an instructive squabble occurs between these two literary modes. The scene is the conference room, where Marcus Chalfen is delivering the news about the mouse. All of the book's major characters are present. Irie Jones is pregnant, and for a while we inhabit her mind, and her drifting thoughts. She looks from Millat to Magid, and cannot decide which twin is the father of her child. But she stops worrying, because Smith breaks in, excitedly, to tell us that "Irie's child can never be mapped exactly nor spoken of with any certainty. Some secrets are permanent. In a vision, Irie has seen a time, a time not far from now, when roots won't matter any more because they can't because they mustn't because they're too long and they're too tortuous and they're just buried too damn deep. She looks forward to it."

Yet it is Smith who made Irie, most improbably, have sex with both brothers, and it is Smith who decided that Irie, most improbably, has stopped caring who is the father. It is quite clear that a general message about the need to escape roots is more important than Irie's reality, what she might actually think, her consciousness. A character has been sacrificed for what Smith called, in that interview, "ideas and themes that I can tie together—problem-solving from other places and worlds." This is problem-solving, all right. But at what cost? As Irie disappears under the themes and ideas, the reader perhaps thinks wistfully of Mr. Micawber and David Copperfield, so uncovered by theme and idea, so uninsured, weeping together in an upstairs room. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

"nuclear" as "noo-kyoo-lar." He understands deterrence but is not imprisoned by a Bush-style cold war mindset: he'll rub against anyone's leg.

Let the games begin!

MICHAEL KATZ
Berkeley, California

TO THE EDITORS:

Few journals displayed the courage of THE NEW REPUBLIC in taking George W. Bush to task for his inane recent address on American nuclear strategy. Bush knows next to nothing about the military, national security, tactics, or strategy. Still, he has a fallback position: he will surround himself with experts tendering advice.

Yet, in part, you may have failed to notice the forest for the trees. W. may well be the next president of the United States. We could be stuck with him and his banalities.

ELLIOTT A. COHEN
Santa Barbara, California

The enigma of arrival

TO THE EDITORS:

Thank you for the refreshing and insightful piece by Negar Akhavi ("Exile," June 12). As a member of the Iranian community, I can say that she did an excellent job in representing our hopes for the future and our errors of the past. The article has circulated among the Iranian community in Northern California and the praises are making us proud to be Iranians in America.

BIJAN ALEVI, M.D.
San Francisco, California

TO THE EDITORS:

In "Exile," Negar Akhavi states that "the only real Iranian lobby in Washington is Iranians for International Cooperation (IIC)." However, there are indeed other Iranian-American lobbying firms active in Washington. Some are even more active and effective than IIC.

For instance, the Iranian-American lobbying firm World Political Action Committee (WPAC) has circulated petitions in the Iranian-American community on issues such as U.S. travel restrictions against Iranians and their effects on the Iranian-American community. In addition, WPAC has had several meetings with officials at the State Department and in Congress to remedy this unfair treatment of Iranians. For instance, the protest against fingerprinting the Iranian soccer players and wrestling team, initiated by WPAC, successfully ended with a waiver issued by the Department of Justice for the athletes' entrance into the United States.

MOZHGAN MOJAB
President
World Political Action Committee
Rockville, Maryland

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Foe Pas

WHEN YOU'RE IN THE opinion-journalism business, you inevitably make enemies. The trick lies in picking ones who will make you look good, not only in the short run but for years to come. If you have just spent 3,000 words arguing that Representative Jones is a malicious, provincial scum ball, the last thing you want is to pick up *The Washington Post* and read that Jones has just authored a brilliant treatise or left Congress to raise money for orphans. At the same time, it's important that your adversary have sufficient credentials so that you won't be accused of beating up on a helpless foe. The Platonic ideal is the hard-to-find pairing of perpetual malevolence with an impressive-sounding resumé.

IT HAS THUS BEEN MY GOOD FORTUNE to have as my bête noire a man named Stephen Moore. With his lofty titles—fiscal policy studies director at the Cato Institute, president of the Club for Growth (a pro-tax-cut PAC), columnist for *National Review*—and evident difficulty with arithmetic, Moore is a near-perfect figure with whom to conduct a Washington feud. Moore is a leading apologist for supply-side economics, a small but powerful cult that holds that tiny changes in tax rates, especially for the affluent, can have fantastical economic effects. In 1993, for example, supply-siders insisted that President Clinton's tax hike on the rich would shrink the economy, destroy jobs, increase the deficit, and generally (as Moore wrote at the time) "torpedo" the economy. But fate did not bring us together until 1997, when Moore, still trying to vindicate his prediction, wrote an unintentionally hilarious *Wall Street Journal* op-ed purporting to show that tax revenues grew faster under President Reagan's watch than under Clinton's. This contrarian thesis required Moore to engage in a pair of whopping statistical distortions. First, he lumped Clinton's presidency together with George Bush's, thus including in the Clinton era the 1991 recession, during which revenue growth was slow. Second, he didn't subtract for inflation, which artificially magnifies tax-revenue growth and was much higher under Reagan, thus tilting the comparison even further. Comically, even with all his flimflam, Moore still found that tax revenues grew faster under Clinton and Bush (52 percent) than under Reagan (50 percent). But he claimed exoneration anyway—either assuming that readers would gloss over the numbers or failing to realize that 52 is greater than 50.

MOORE'S PERFIDY SO AGITATED ME that I wrote about it in these pages. It was a highly therapeutic act—one that, I hoped, might even cure me of my macabre fixation with supply-siders. Instead, it has entangled my career, perhaps inextricably, with Moore's. I have become known, within a very, very tiny circle of policy wonks, as the anti-Moore. It is a modest niche, and an undemanding one. Others can wage colossal debates with the giants of academe. I choose to make my name by periodically knocking down a straw man who happens to be a real person.

HAPPILY, MOORE CONTINUES TO oblige. In response to my 1997 article, he wrote a letter to THE NEW REPUBLIC challenging me to a bet. Clinton and Congress had just agreed to lower the top tax rate on capital gains from 28 percent to 20 percent, and Moore proposed that "over the next five years, capital gains tax receipts will be higher (adjusted for inflation) than they have been in the previous five years.... I have $2,000 that says a 40 [*sic*] percent rate cut will produce *more* revenue to the Treasury in that period. Let us see whether THE NEW REPUBLIC's smug writers are willing to put their money where their mouth is." Moore has been taunting me about this bet ever since. The following year he wrote in *National Review* that capital gains revenues were indeed rising and crowed, "I challenged Chait in print to a $1,000 [*sic*] bet that the capital gains tax cut would cause capital gains revenue to rise. Chait declined." And again, writing in the latest *NR*, Moore glories once more in my cowardice. "For all their apparent self-confidence, liberals don't like putting their money where their mouth is," he gloats.

WHAT MOORE CONSISTENTLY FAILS TO mention is that I didn't take his bet because I *agreed* that capital gains revenues would probably rise. But I also argued that this didn't vindicate his theory. Just because a cut in the capital gains tax *precedes* a rise in capital gains revenues doesn't mean the tax cut *caused* the gain in revenues. Serious conservative economists, who have more sophisticated arguments for capital gains tax cuts, would never make Moore's ludicrous claim; there are too many other factors at work. First of all, the long bull market, which began before the tax cut, would have made capital gains revenues rise regardless—in fact, they might have grown even faster if not for the tax cut. Second, much of the increase in capital gains revenues simply reflects paper-shuffling. If you lower the tax rate on capital gains without lowering the tax rate on ordinary income, you encourage people to express their income through capital gains. Many tax shelters are designed to do exactly this. So capital gains tax revenues may rise in part because people are shifting their income from a high-tax category into a low-tax one—resulting in a net revenue loss for the government. Acknowledging this argument, Moore replied in last week's *NR* that people could not be shifting money from normal kinds of income because "individual income tax revenues have risen by $100 billion a year." Well, duh. They, too, were rising before 1997, and they would have kept rising in any case.

THE REASON MOORE CAN'T COMPREhend this point is that he is gripped by a monocausal explanation of the world. His brain lacks the capacity to process any economic theory that takes into account factors other than tax rates. Within the narrow confines of Moore's logic, if you don't think a capital gains tax cut will cause an economic boom, then you must think it will destroy the economy. That's why monocausalists can make such confident predictions. Say you believe the economy hinges on the price of zucchini. There will be times when a rise in zucchini prices is followed by an economic boom, and then you can claim vindication and taunt the enemies who said you were mad. If zucchini plummets and the economy booms anyway, then you can argue that we're still benefiting from the big zucchini run-up of 1981.

MY ONLY CONCERN ABOUT MOORE IS that he'll take up with some more attractive foe. In his latest article, Moore devotes almost as much space to assaulting *Slate* editor Michael Kinsley as he does to me. Worse, Kinsley is the recipient of Moore's most obviously wrong barb. (Quoting Kinsley as describing the GOP's 1994 Contract with America as an "impossible combination of tax cuts and spending increases and balanced-budget promises" that "can't be done," Moore retorts with a sneering "Oops." Oops? When the GOP tried to make the spending cuts needed to fulfill all their promises, they found that, well, it couldn't be done.) It's reassuring to find that Moore is as dense as ever. But his infidelity is alarming. Why is he lavishing his best material on Kinsley? He doesn't need you, Steve. I do.

JONATHAN CHAIT

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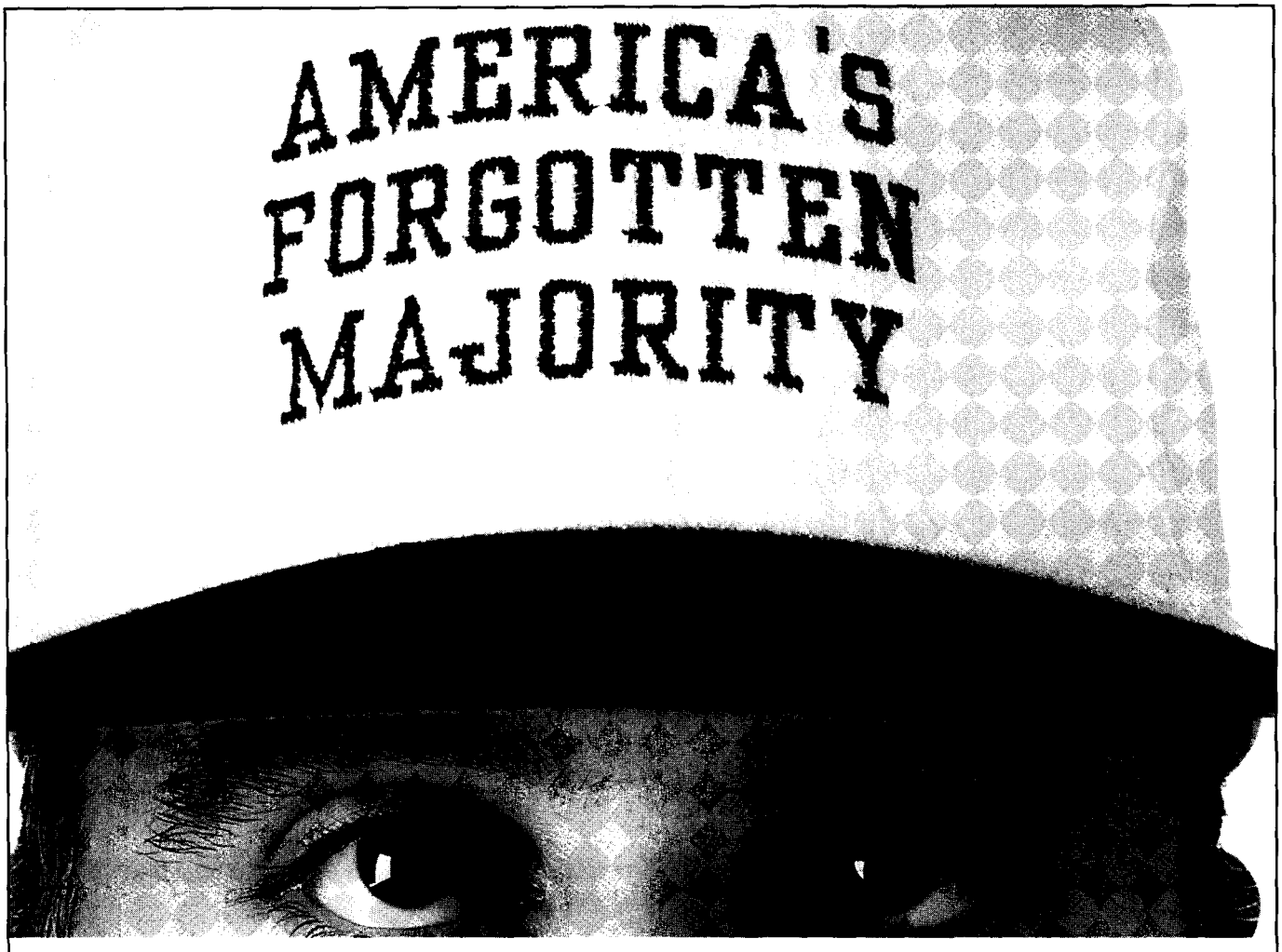

Why the White Working Class Still Matters

RUY TEIXEIRA AND JOEL ROGERS

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